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LADY LEE'S WIDOWHOOD.

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LADY LEE'S WIDOWHOOD

BY

EDWARD BRUCE HAMLEY

CAPTAIN R.A.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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LADY LEE'S WIDOWHOOD.

CHAPTER I.

One of the most charming features of a fairy tale is the vagueness of the date of its events and characters. There is a magic about the phrase "Once upon a time," investing subsequent ogres, genii, fairies, flying chariots, moralising mice, and booted cats, with a delightful harmony and probability. For this reason I have always considered the reign of Haroun Alraschid, gorgeous and romantic as it is, infinitely less interesting than that of the young king of the Black Isles, whose royal body was half of flesh, half of marble; and not to be compared for a moment with the histories of those other misty potentates Prince Camaralzaman and King Beder; while the glory of Pippin

faded from my infant mind, like the unsubstantial pageant of a vision, the moment he was discovered to have been an authentic monarch of France.

This early predilection for what may be called the No-man's-Land, or Tom Tidler's ground, of chronology, has caused me to regard those authors who commence their narratives with such phrases as "towards the close of the last century," or "about the middle of George the Second's reign," as acting on a mistaken principle. It is not only unnecessary, but is also impolitic, as wilfully depriving the production of what might have been its solitary charm. It is as if a rejuvenated spinster were voluntarily to pull off her wig, spit out her false teeth, walk out of her crinoline, and, standing before the world, bald, toothless, and shameless, proclaim herself fifty-five.

Once upon a time, then, (to guard against this error), there was assembled in a room at the Heronry, the residence of Lady Lee, a goodly company—goodly, not so much in point of numbers as in personal appearance. Three ladies were there, all young, and none of them plain.

Lady Lee was a young widow, the handsomest since Dido. Her face was pale and oval, her eyes magnificent, but somewhat languid. Her hair formed a splendid framework to her face, being of the richest and darkest chestnut, scattered with ruddy, golden gleams,

dancing on its innumerable ripples. It formed a sort of natural diadem, but was now, unfortunately, hidden by a close crimped widow's cap.

Orelia Payne was a tall dark beauty, with a nose strongly arched, a curved and somewhat severe mouth, a cleft chin, and straight dark eyebrows surmounting black sparkling eyes.

Rosa Young was a plump fair little thing, with a face of a quaint and somewhat comic cast. Her nose turned up slightly, and was obsequiously followed by her upper lip, thus displaying the least glimpse in the world of very white teeth. Her complexion was very fresh, and would, perhaps, have been too ruddy, if the red had not been of such a delicious colour that you decided, at a glance, it was impossible to have too much of such a good thing; besides, if your eye wanted relief, there was the white of her neck or the blue of her eyes to turn to. Her hair was carried off above her ears and dressed plain, or at least intended to be so; but stray tresses were perpetually breaking out of bounds, and wandering in libertine curls about her cheeks, ears, and neck, requiring to be caught and pinned up in a supplementary fashion, till the number of these truants increased to such an extent that the whole structure had to be remodelled. Only two little curls, like those on a drake's tail, were authorised to appear, one on each cheek, near the ears.

Orelia was standing with palette and brush before an easel. She had already chalked on the canvass the proportions of Lady Lee's face and figure. Her ladyship sat at a little distance, and by her side stood her little son, Julius Lee, about four years old.

"I am puzzled as to what characters to draw you in," said Orelia. "Venus and Cupid—there's that plaguy Rubens and Titian have used up the mythology; then, for a Scriptural subject, Hagar and Ishmael wouldn't suit you—you are too English, and Juley's too fair."

"Why can't you paint them in their own characters?" said Rosa. "They are not such bad characters, are they?"

"It's so flat and prosaic," returned Orelia, "to paint things just as they are. No; we'll have something classical. What do you think of Virgilia and the young Coriolanus?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Rosa. "Virgilia in a widow's cap! Why, Coriolanus was all alive, wasn't he? We must take it off," said Rosa, stealing behind Lady Lee and loosening the strings, "and I wish you'd never put it on again."

"Yes; pull it off," said Orelia. "A horrid thing it is. She would look four years younger without it—yes, five. It gives her a respectable look that's quite

frightful. A widow's cap," continued the grand Orelia, sententiously, "is a species of suttee."

Lady Lee, after an unsuccessful attempt to catch the cap with both hands as it was being plucked off, glanced at it with a sigh.

"Poor Sir Joseph!" she said.

"Oh, you fright!" shrieked Rosa, who, having put the cap on her own head, had got on a chair to look at herself in a mirror over the mantelpiece. "O you ugly little thing!" holding up both her hands at her own reflection. "I'll die a maid," continued Rosa, descending from the chair; "for I never could live a widow—at least, not with this thing on my head."

"I'd rather have 'sacred to the memory' printed on my forehead in capital letters," said Orelia.

"I'd rather be married again in the first week of my widowhood than wear it," said Rosa, positively.

"Madcap *versus* mobcap," said her ladyship, smiling at Rosa. "Come, give it me."

"Never!" cried Rosa, who, having hung the cap on a chandelier, was now performing a sort of Indian scalp-dance round it. "She's got a dozen of 'em in a box up-stairs, Orelia, but we'll burn 'em all."

"I believe I should be more comfortable without it," said Lady Lee, smoothing her hair; "but what would the world say?"

"I thought you didn't care a pin what the world

said," Rosa replied. "Aren't you always boasting of your independence?"

"True," said her ladyship; "I don't know why I should care. Well, I'll think about leaving off the cap."

"And you had better think of leaving off some other things at the same time," said Rosa. "For instance, you might leave off shutting yourself up in this house, like an old hermit with a beard and a hair shirt; and you might leave off treating young men so coldly, who want to love you, and to come and visit you—that is, you may do so when Orelia and I are not here, for we don't want them; and we're all very happy at present, aren't we, Reley? and it's only for your good I'm speaking."

"You ought to mix in society, and to travel, and see the world," said Orelia. "O heavens! if I were as rich as you" ("She's as rich as a Jew," muttered Rosa), "I'd see everything that was grand and excellent in nature and art. I'd go," said Orelia, flourishing her portcrayon, "to all the great cities of Europe; I'd make studies in the Vatican and the Pitti Palace —I'd sit on the Bridge of Sighs and read 'Childe Harold'—I'd go to Constantinople and fall in love with a Giaour—I'd see Palestine—I'd cross the Desert on a dromedary—I'd visit the bright East and the far West—and, when these were exhausted, I'd come back

to the Heronry again, to sit on the daisies and think of all I had seen."

"Dear me," said Lady Lee, "you remind me, my dear, of fancies of my own that I used to have before I was married. You remember, Orelia, how romantic I was in my maiden days. I used to sit in the porch of that old parsonage reading a novel or a play, and every now and then dropping the book on my lap, while I would follow out a romance of my own, conjured up by some passage that struck me—visions of charming friendships, where I, a female Damon, underwent unheard-of sacrifices for a Pythias of my own sex—of love, too, where I was wooed by an infinity of lovers, all made after the same perfect pattern, until these ended in Sir Joseph Lee."

"Sir Joseph wasn't romantic, was he?" asked Rosa. "At least, I should think not, judging from his picture in the library."

"He was better than romantic, Rosa," said Lady Lee, gravely; "he had a kind heart. But no—you are right, my dear; he was not romantic. Ah, heavens! to think of the difference between the ideal and the real! Not but that Sir Joseph was an excellent and kind man, but it was very hard to learn to look upon him as a lover."

"How *did* you manage it?" asked Orelia.

"To say the truth, my dear," said her ladyship,

"I did not surrender my cherished visions either easily or suddenly. But you, Orelia, know what were the unfortunate circumstances of my family at that time, though you can scarcely imagine the full extent of our trials; however, a fond father, suffering at once from disease and debt, the entreaties of relatives, and the promptings of gratitude (for Sir Joseph had assisted my father most generously),—these motives, joined to a due sense of Sir Joseph's good and liberal nature, will perhaps account sufficiently for my marriage."

Tears of pity came into Rosa's eyes—she was a very sympathetic little thing. She went to seat herself on the sofa by Lady Lee, and squeezed her hand.

"But, now," said Rosa presently—"now that you've been free to follow your own fancies these three years, why don't you do so?"

Lady Lee laughed. "I have not yet met with my ideal hero," she said; "and if I did, I really don't think I should admire him. My taste for romance is dreadfully impaired. A Byronic hero at my feet would excite ridicule rather than sympathy. And so, seeing that love without romance is a very humdrum affair, and that I have lost my capacity for seeing things in 'the light that never was on sea or shore,' the thought of love or matrimony never enters my head."

"If I were a man," said Orelia, "I'd make you love me. I'd do something chivalrous that should compel your admiration in spite of yourself; and then, after dragging you at my chariot-wheels for a while, till you were completely subdued, I'd run away with you."

"And if I were a man," said Rosa, "I'd beg and entreat you to love me. I'd follow you about, telling you how beautiful, how clever you were (for you are, and you know it), and how all your beauty and cleverness is running to waste from mere don't-care-ishness; and how, by loving me, they would both of them suddenly bloom and brighten, till they were as bright as—as bright as anything," said Rosa, not finding any more brilliant or exact simile after her pause; "and I'd never leave telling you, and begging you, till you yielded, half from pity for me, half from consideration to yourself."

Lady Lee smiled, and called her a foolish little thing, and for that time the conversation dropped; but it was renewed again that night by Orelia and Rosa. They slept, by their own desire, in the same room. Orelia, who used rather to tyrannise over her companion in this dormitory, inhabited a large square four-poster, with a heavy carved tester, and curtains which she would let down all round her at night, and become invisible as the man in a Punch's show;

while Rosa occupied a little French bed that fitted into an alcove at the end of the room, and was covered by a chintz curtain hanging from a pole that stuck out of the wall, in which nest she would chirp herself to sleep like any wren.

Rosa had been delivering some sentiments respecting Lady Lee similar to those in her last speech, just recorded.

"Bless me!" cried Orelia, "and how did you get so learned in matters of the heart, you pert absurdity? Has anybody been teaching you? Just let me catch you having a lover without letting me know."

"No, no," said Rosa, blushing in the dark like her namesake of Lancaster; "I haven't got one, and I don't want one. I couldn't be more brilliant than I am."

"Oh, quite impossible!" quoth the sarcastic Orelia.

"I don't mean that I am particularly bright, but that a lover wouldn't make me any brighter. But there's Lady Lee withering away like—like anything," said Rosa, recurring to her favourite simile of all-work, "and all for want of watering. She don't care much about anything. She's the best-natured dear creature in the world when her good nature's woke up; but it goes to sleep again in a minute. So does her cleverness, which just keeps

awake long enough to show us what it could do if it wasn't such a sluggard. It's my belief she could write a beautiful novel or poem whenever she chose —just see what letters and charades and songs she writes—but she don't choose. She could have any clever man at her feet if she chose, but she don't choose. And she'll go on wasting her herself," said Rosa, "till she's a stupid old dowager, and then nobody will care about her."

"Don't you know she can't marry, except under conditions?" said Orelia. "Just listen, and as I'm not particularly sleepy, I'll tell you about it."

"Do," said Rosa, throwing back the curtain over the head of her bed for the convenience of hearing better.

"You must know, then," said Orelia, "that the late Sir Joseph, though very fond of his wife, was very much ruled by his uncle, Colonel Bagot Lee, who is expected here in a day or two. Sir Joseph was, I believe, a good sort of weak man, and easily ruled, and Colonel Lee is a knowing, and, as I've heard, somewhat overbearing man of the world. He was a great oracle with Sir Joseph on all points, and had some hand, I fancy, in the concoction of his will, by which Lady Lee is to have a handsome income so long as she remains unmarried, or, afterwards, if—if, mind you—she marries with Colonel Lee's consent.

If she marries without it, she forfeits most of her income, part of which goes to Julius, part to Bagot, who also, in that case, becomes guardian to the child."

"Dear me!" said Rosa, "how stupid of Sir Joseph! What did he do that for?"

"Partly, I believe, because of the superlative idea he entertained of Bagot's judgment and discretion, which he thought might be useful to such a young widow, for she was only twenty when he died — partly, perhaps, from a sort of posthumous jealousy of his successor."

"A wretch!" cried Rosa; "I always suspected him of being a stupid useless sort of creature, and now I positively hate him."

"So do I," said Orelia, yawning. "But I'm getting sleepy now. By the by," she resumed, after a pause, during which Rosa was pondering what she had just heard, "you're quite sure nobody's been making love to you?"

"Oh, quite!" said Rosa, hastily.

"And—you don't know—you don't know of anybody you like better than the rest?" said Orelia, sleepily.

"Nobody, upon my word," said Rosa. But I don't think Orelia heard the reply, having just dropped off into a slumber.

And here we will take the opportunity to add a few general particulars to Orelia's information.

Lady Lee had been, when Hester Broome, a poor clergyman's daughter, full, as she described herself, of feeling, of sentiment, of romance, and of bright hopes for the future; but these did not make up her character, for her dreams were dreamt amidst the realities of household occupations, and the acquisition of various accomplishments, and much solid information. Unfortunately for Hester, she had a dash of genius in her composition—she was not merely imaginative, but original and spirited in her imaginations. A talent for summoning up charming reveries of angels with wings, lovers with beautiful black whiskers, and life all sunshine and no clouds, is very abundant in boarding-schools, watering-places, and elsewhere, ending, sometimes consistently, in Gretna Green and the divorce courts; sometimes inconsistently, in corpulent content with humdrum connubiality. But Hester's visions were the results of her own fancy, guided only by her own tastes, and it was proportionably hard to abandon them.

Sir Joseph Lee was a baronet of good property—good-natured, as she said, but also, as she did not say, though she must often have thought it, a very weak man. He was so exceedingly inane, that when, during his courtship, he left off spectacles, and took

to an eye-glass, it was positively a new feature in his character, and, conjoined with his abandonment of a white hat and gaiters, hitherto his constant wear, produced such a change, that you would hardly have known him for the same man. His family seat, his property, his baronetcy, had been to him what office was to the late Whig ministry—giving him, as their occupant, a casual identity and reputation.

Bagot Lee, his uncle, formerly a lieutenant-colonel in the Guards, was about eight-and-forty; very knowing, very dissipated, and very extravagant. He had impressed his nephew with a wonderful respect for him. Sir Joseph saw him plunging familiarly into horse-racing, chicken-hazard, acquaintance with opera-dancers, and other vortices, floating and revelling there as if he enjoyed it, while the baronet shivered, and feebly shouted on the brink. He saw him, when he came down into the country, treat the magnates of the county with a coolness which he tried in vain to imitate, and to which they seemed obliged to submit. He had seen him whisper before the race to the jockey who rode the winner of the Derby. He had seen him terrify a steward of whom Sir Joseph stood in great awe, and cause him to prove himself a cheat.

In fact, Sir Joseph's estimate of Bagot's capacity was formed on a principle that half the world unconsciously adopt. Seeing Bagot's superiority in matters

of which he (the baronet) was capable of judging, he gave him credit for the same superiority in other matters of which he was not capable of judging. How could a man who could make such a capital betting-book—who was so skilful a billiard-player—be otherwise than a safe guide in the affairs of life—be surpassed as an adviser on all difficult points? Bagot's sharpness seemed to Sir Joseph to include all excellence whatsoever. He would not have been at all surprised (though many other people might) had Bagot showed himself a great general, a great author, or a great statesman, nor would his respect for him have been thereby at all increased. And pray, sir, do you never judge of your acquaintances in this way? Nay, more—do you never carry the principle farther, and conclude that all those, with whose reported merits you cannot sympathise, must necessarily be impostors? Ah, heavens!—how often does one see, and hear of, genius clipped and pared and shorn down to the mental standard of some Procrustes with an inch of intellect—some pert or solemn owl, who thanks God for his ignorance, and, as the most hard-hitting of doctors said, "has a great deal to be thankful for."

About a year after his marriage, Sir Joseph found himself dying of a consumption. Of course, he could not depart comfortably from the world, nor make his final arrangements, without the assistance of Bagot.

"Bagot," said the sick man, "I'm off. I shan't last long. I've done what I thought you would like about the—the document, you know, with regard to Lady Lee and the boy; take care of him—take care of both of 'em, Bagot; I've put you down for ten thousand."

"You were always a good fellow, Joe," said Bagot, "and if you were really going to give us the slip, I should be confoundedly grieved. I should, by gad," (which was true enough, for the baronet was a comfortable annuity to him.) "But I hope to see you at Ascot yet."

"No," said Sir Joseph, "no more Ascot for me. They've as good as told me it's all up with me. The Rector's been over here praying with me. Do you think it's any good, Bagot?"

Bagot was rather puzzled at being consulted as a spiritual adviser. "Why," said he, "putting the case, you see, that a fellow was really going off the hooks —not that I believe it, you know, for you're looking twice the man you did yesterday—but just supposing it, for the sake of argument, the thing might be decent and comfortable. If I found myself the easier for it, of course I'd do it."

"Hester brought him," said Sir Joseph. "Poor Hester! I've been very fond of that girl, Bagot—fonder than I ever was of anything, I think. She

was too good for me ; but I think she liked me, too. Nobody seems so sorry about me as she does."

"Have you put any restriction," said Bagot, "on her marrying again ? I mean in case of anything happening, you know ?"

"No," said Sir Joseph ; "I never thought about it. I have left her the income and the use of the house unconditionally."

"Ah," said Bagot, musingly, "she's young—devilish young—and women take strange fancies sometimes. There will be no end of fellows after her. I shouldn't like, Joe, my boy, to see her making a fool of herself with some infernal nincompoop, after your——in case of anything happening, you know."

"Do you think it's likely ?" said Sir Joseph, eagerly. "Do you know of anybody that?——Bagot ! if I thought that, I'd—"

"No, no," replied Bagot ; "I don't know anything of the sort. *I* was merely talking of what might be. It would be deuced painful to me, you know ; and its a sort of thing I might easily stop, if I was authorised ; if not, of course I shouldn't meddle."

Bagot's idea was, that, in the event of his nephew's melancholy anticipations being fulfilled, the young widow's next choice might possibly fall on one very unlike Sir Joseph. It might fall on a man totally

averse to Bagot's pursuits—nay, even to his society; and thus (the Colonel reflected) that pleasant retreat, the Heronry, might be closed to him altogether, or, at any rate, rendered a much less eligible abode; and these contingencies he now exerted himself to guard against.

Sir Joseph's was a mind in which, when an idea did enter, it got plenty of elbow-room, and was in no danger of being jostled by other ideas. All that night he beheld nincompoop successors ruling at the Heronry, and effacing his image from the memory of Lady Lee. The next morning he again spoke to Bagot on the subject.

"I've been considering what you said," Sir Joseph began. "But don't you think 'twould be hard to tie her down in any way?—she's been a good wife to me. Wouldn't it be fair to let her please herself next time? Perhaps she didn't last time, when she married me. I've sometimes thought so."

"Do as you like," said Bagot; "I merely advised what would be best, in my opinion, for the interest of all parties. 'Tis no more than other husbands—fond husbands, too, Joe—constantly do; and it's natural, too. I can only say (as a bachelor), it seems to me that the thought of my wife talking over my errors, in confidence with another fellow who mightn't understand me the least—ripping up my peccadilloes—revealing little nonsensical connubial secrets that

had no great harm in 'em, perhaps, though the idea of anybody else knowing 'em makes a fellow feel deucedly foolish—like having your letters read to the court in a breach-of-promise case—by gad, Joe, I can only say, the thought of it would keep me walking till the day of judgment."

"Yes, true—there's a good deal in that," said Sir Joseph. "It would make me feel more comfortable to know that was prevented. But then it seems wrong, Bagot, that I should be giving myself comfort at the expense, perhaps, of her wishes."

"But it won't be at her expense," said Bagot—"how the deuce will it? She would be much happier with a proper person—such as you would yourself approve of—and you'll be happier in the thought of it."

"Besides," pursued Sir Joseph, "I doubt if Hester, in case of her taking a fancy to anybody, would be much influenced in her attachment by money considerations. Hester's not mercenary, Bagot."

"Try another dodge, then," said Bagot (who was beginning to forget that he ought to appear feeling, and talked as coolly as if Sir Joseph were a third person, not particularly interested in the question of his own decease). "In case of her marrying without my approval, make over the guardianship of Juley to somebody else."

"But it would seem so distrustful—so cruel," urged Sir Joseph.

"Cruel only to be kind," said Bagot. "It's all for her good. But this is but dismal talk, Joe. I shall live to see you burn the will yet. Begad! you shall burn it on the day Juley comes of age."

Sir Joseph shook his head. Some feeling, more powerful even than his confidence in Bagot, thrust aside the hope which his words sought to convey. That day he sent for his man of law, and altered his will, which eventually ordered matters in accordance with Bagot's advice, as Orelia had told Rosa.

Sir Joseph prophesied truly that there was to be no more Ascot for him. A few days afterwards he died quite calmly, as people generally do, notwithstanding the quantity of descriptive power that has been lavished on death-bed scenes. As Mrs Quickly would say, "'A made a fine end, and went away, an it had been any christom child." Holding Bagot's hand, as if he might thus keep himself *en rapport* with the busy, club-going, betting world in which he had lived, Sir Joseph's feeble spark went out.

CHAPTER II.

Rosa, constitutionally an early riser, used to be always up before Orelia in the morning, until the latter took it into her head to have a shower-bath fitted up in the closet that opened from their room. Into this she would enter every morning with great majesty, and pull the string with no more hesitation than if she had been ringing the bell for her maid, and would subsequently emerge, all calm and fresh and shining. But not content with indulging in this luxury herself, she would also insist upon getting it filled again for Rosa; and that was the reason why Rosa, who preferred performing her ablutions in a less terrible manner, began to be lazy of a morning—pretending to be sleepy—to be interested in a book—and other devices to while away the time, till Orelia would come and pull her out of bed. Then the little thing, all shrinking and shivering, with her hair drawn into a tight knot at the back of her head, would be driven, in a

sort of tottering run, towards the dreaded deluge by her imperious task-mistress—balancing herself on the rim of the bath before entering—and then, tremblingly, would stretch her hand towards the cord, in which one might suppose, from her trepidation, she had been ordered to hang herself. Then she would beg to be allowed to draw the curtains of the bath, which Orelia would by no means permit, suspecting she might in some way evade the ordeal, unless strictly watched. Then she would pretend to recollect something particular to tell Orelia, who, not to be baffled in that way, would sternly order her to tell her by and by, and to pull the string without further nonsense; and poor Rosa, thus detected, would get up a little shivering laugh, broken short off by the prospect of her impending and inevitable doom; and, shutting her eyes and mouth so tight that those features became mere threads in her comical little face, and putting her plump little shoulders considerably above her ears, she would hold her breath, and fumble blindly for the string, till Orelia, out of all patience, would give the fatal twitch, when a strangled shriek might be heard in the descending rush like that of a caught mouse, and Rosa would emerge all pink and palpitating, and glad it was over.

The maid, Kitty Fillett, who came in next morning to assist at their toilet, asked if they had any objec-

tion to her taking a holiday. Doddington Fair—a fair famous throughout the country—was to take place that day, and Harry Noble the groom had offered to drive her and two other fortunate domestics to see the shows, and to eat gingerbread. Rosa Young thought she would like to go too.

"What low tastes you have, Rosalinda," said the grand Orelia. (Rosa, by the by, was known by some fifteen or twenty appellations—Rosamunda, Rosalia, Rosetta—answering, in fact, to almost anything beginning with an R.) "I suppose you would like to play thimble-rig too, and to see the dwarf and giant, and follow Punch, and to ride in the roundabout."

Rosa confessed a desire to see the giant and dwarf, and Punch she acknowledged to be quite a passion with her.

"And there's the soldiers, Miss Rosa," said Fillett, "with the beautifullest regimentals!—gold hats with horse tails, handsomer than the Fire Brigade's; and coats—oh, such coats!—they say the officers' cost hundreds of pounds!" Fillett was enthusiastic on the subject of the military.

Here was an additional inducement for Rosa, who had never seen dragoons in her life; and accordingly, in spite of the certainty of undergoing Orelia's contempt, she resolved, as she left the apartment on her way to the breakfast-room, to be present at the fair, if she could possibly manage it.

Rosa Young's mode of perambulating the house and grounds was will-o'-the-wispish—eccentric as if in pursuit of an imaginary butterfly—bringing her sometimes into contact with staid persons—butlers, housekeepers, clergymen, and the like, coming composedly and unsuspectingly round corners, from whose bodies she would rebound violently; and she had been carrying about with her, for some days, a plain impression of a heron with a fish in his claw (the device of the Lees) on her left temple, in consequence of rushing with her head right into the footman's waistcoat, as he was coming out of the room with the breakfast things, sending the contents of the sugar-basin into his open mouth, and those of the cream-jug into his waistcoat-pocket. Also, she had more than once in the garden, when appearing unexpectedly and swiftly from behind apple-trees, knocked the gardener into his own wheelbarrow.

These accidents never occurred to Orelia, whose style of progression was stately and imposing, as if she had two pursuivants, a gold stick in waiting, and a great nobleman carrying her crown, all marching in procession in front of her; so that, though they left their chamber together, Rosa danced into Lady Lee's presence in the breakfast-room at least seventeen seconds and a half before Orelia entered.

This room was one of the prettiest breakfast-rooms

in England, so that, besides breakfasting, one would have had no objection to lunch, dine, and sup there also. It was octagonal, being situated in one of the turrets. Three sides of the octagon were occupied by fresco designs of a comic and graceful character;—fairies fled before Bottom with his ass's head, danced before Titania, made merry with Puck. This latter personage, indeed, was positively ubiquitous, flying along the wall on royal errands, popping his quaint ugly face out from behind oak-leaves, lurking under mushrooms, and subsequently performing somersets on the ceiling. Two sides were occupied by the door and fire-place, two by a double-faced bow-window, filled with diamond panes of glass set in stone. Through these panes you looked on a landscape outlined by a different hand—Dame Nature's own, with the design filled up by some happy touches of her scholar man. A few paces from the house, the ground sloped so rapidly that the descent was marked only by the diminishing tops of the pine trees which clothed it, sinking fast, one below another, till they disappeared; then far below—so far that many a broad acre intervened—a grassy meadow came out beyond the crest of the pine wood, the cows that grazed there looking quite small in the distance as they lay among the daisies, or walked out into the clear brown water of the river, which ran there in a semicircle, dividing

this from another lawn, where stood the old country-house of Monkstone. Behind this house ran a road losing itself among trees, but whose course was marked by a village that peeped shadily from amidst openings in the foliage—the parsonage-house standing prim and white in the midst of the green glebe, with a quickset round it, like a duenna, to keep the other houses from being too familiar. By this time the eye ceased to take in any more details, seeing only gentle slops flowing upwards from each other, till the sky rose blue behind.

But to come in-doors again. Lady Lee was generally attired in some light-coloured muslin of a morning, and accompanied, while she arranged the bouquets on the breakfast-table, by Blanco, a white pointer, to which she had taken a fancy when he was a pup in Sir Joseph's time, and by Julius, either seated in an arm-chair of suitable dimensions, with his cat Pick in his lap, or in pursuit of that associate—for the boy and his cat were seldom far apart. Pick, though in the main a good-tempered animal, would sometimes be exasperated out of all bounds by being lugged about with his head and fore-paws under Julius's arm, and his tail dragging on the ground, till he was half-strangled; and, extricating himself with a violent struggle, would make off, waving his tail in a wrathful and majestic manner as he sat grimly under chairs,

sofas, ladies' dresses, and other places of retirement, into which Julius would follow on all fours, and, seizing him by leg, ear, or any other prominent part of his person that came to hand, bear him growling away, with his fur and his temper alike ruffled and rubbed against the grain.

When Orelia and Rosa appeared, Pick's wrongs, however, were presently avenged. They would make at Julius, and hug him like a pair of boa-constrictors that had made prey of a young antelope. Between them, this wretched child led a terrible life of it. Besides those kisses which he was bribed to give with sugar-plums, promises of having fairy tales told to him, of being allowed to see picture-books, and the like allurements, he was incessantly snatched from the ground, and caressed into a state of high floridity, without any assignable cause whatsoever. The ordinary feminine propensity to lavish endearments on all available young children seemed to flourish greatly in the bosoms of these young ladies, and to be all concentrated on Julius. They wouldn't have dared to treat one of their size so. It was really enough to excite the sympathy of any man, with a human heart in his breast, to see Rosa fling him down among the sofa cushions, with his head in Orelia's lap, and, while the legs of the little victim kicked convulsively in the air, and his hands pulled down the tresses of his tor-

mentor, so as to screen the two faces beneath it, then and there, deliberately proceed to bite his chin, pinch his ears and his nose, and practise many other cruelties; while Orelia, by insidious ticklings, would convert his shrieks into laughter. I can only say, I wouldn't have been in his place myself on any account.

Lady Lee kissed Rosa, and asked her how she had slept; repeated the greeting to Orelia, and they sat down to breakfast.

At this meal, it was edifying to see the accuracy with which Miss Payne would cut her muffin into little squares, salting each carefully before putting it in her mouth; while Rosa Young fed on a great breakfast-cupful of bread and milk, and an egg, giving Julius (who was supposed to have breakfasted before) alternate spoonfuls of the former, and afterwards administering to him the top of her egg, which he always expected as his lawful perquisite. Then he would post himself at Orelia's side, watching till she had finished; for she always plastered the last square of muffin thickly with jam, as if it were a brick which she was going to build into a muffin wall, and, bidding Julius shut his eyes and open his mouth, which he did with blind confidence, would therewith choke him.

Now, this morning Julius's imagination had been greatly excited by Kitty Fillett, who had come to visit Juley's personal retainer (an elderly personage whom

he called Wifey) while he was undergoing, at her hands, the operation of dressing, and had delivered a glowing and exulting account of the delights she anticipated in Harry Noble's society at the fair. Julius's ideas of fairs were picked up from the illustrations of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, a work he was greatly devoted to from the number and appalling character of the prints it contained, among which was that of Vanity Fair. He had no doubt whatever that Christian and Hopeful would be present on this occasion in person—together with Pickthank, Mr Facingbothways, and many other personages of that famous allegory; nay, he was by no means free from an awful misgiving that Giant Despair, and even Apollyon himself, might be lurking somewhere in the neighbourhood of the festive scene. This had, at first, caused him to beg Fillett, for whom he had a great regard, very earnestly not to go—and, finally, to cry so pathetically at the idea of her being entrapped and eaten by Pagan and Pope, or shut up in Doubting Castle by the formidable giant (both which fates have of late befallen many more noted persons than Kitty), that she was at length obliged to dispel his fears by some assurances more substantial than such generalities as "No, no, Master Julius, they won't eat Kitty;" and became, in pacifying him, so minute in her description of the shows, caravans, and other charms of the fair,

that Julius was now as anxious to accompany as he had before been to prevent her.

Accordingly, on finding that his mamma, to whom he first broached the matter, entirely disapproved of his going, he began to ascertain the sentiments of Orelia and Rosa on the subject, as soon as those young ladies had done pulling him about.

"Miss Payne," said he, as Lady Lee was pouring out the tea, "do you know any giants?"

"No," answered Orelia; "not one."

"Nor dwarfs, that live in little wee houses, with holes to ring bells out of?" said Julius.

Miss Payne assured him that no such persons were among her acquaintance.

"Nor elephants with noses ever so long that they can pick up shillings with?—nor lions with great teeth?—nor blue monkeys?—nor white bears that live in snow houses?—nor Peruvian nightingales?—nor flying griffins?" pursued Julius, adding his own fabulous recollections to Kitty's catalogue of wonders in his eagerness to inspire Orelia with desires similar to his own.

"None of these were entered on her list of friends," Orelia said.

"Ah," said Julius, nodding his head, "but you'd like to know 'em, Miss Payne; and so would Rosa—wouldn't you, Rosa?"

"Yes, my darling emperor Julius," said Rosa; "Rosa would like to see them very much, and she would like her Juleypuley to see them too."

"Don't be putting nonsense in the child's head," said Lady Lee: "Julius knows he's not to go."

"But it's not nonsense, mamma," said Julius; "and all Kitty's cousins are going; and there are beautiful spangled jugglers, and yellow caravans with people living in them, and—and—please, mamma, I do so want to go," said poor Juley, abandoning argument for entreaty with a suddenness that was quite pathetic. But his hard-hearted parent desired him to be quiet, threatening him at the same time with the sugar-tongs; and this rebuff, combined with the long-expected instalment of muffin from Orelia, stopt his mouth for that time.

However, neither he nor Rosa had the least intention of so patiently abandoning their point. Rosa, as before said, wished to go on her own account; but, even if she had not, the sight of Julius's anxiety would have been sufficient to make her his warm advocate. Accordingly, the two spent the morning in practising a number of devices for melting Lady Lee's heart. For instance, after one or two rehearsals in the lobby, the door was flung open, and Julius rushed, or rather toddled, with distracted aspect, into the apartment. Taking with his short legs such

strides that it was a wonder he didn't split in two, and, rapping his palm against his jutting forehead, he went up to where his mother sat, and, clasping his hands and kneeling down, said, "Great queen, listen to my prayer!" And when Lady Lee, calling him a plaguy monkey, asked him what he wanted, he said pathetically, "Take, oh take me to the fair!" after which a suppressed laugh from the inventor of the drama was heard behind the scenes. Then Rosa, entering, took him on her lap to tell him a story—how there was once a little boy, who was a very good little boy, and had a young female friend who loved him very much, and how they lived together in great felicity—at least they would have lived so, only the little boy had a cruel mamma, who never let them do anything they wanted; and how they gradually pined away and died, and were covered with leaves by robin redbreasts, while the cruel mamma, who was sorry for her conduct when it was too late, was borne away by a flying dragon; and that the name of this unnatural parent, who received this signal punishment, was Lee—at which interesting point the sublime allegory was interrupted by Lady Lee laughing and calling them two silly creatures, while Orelia threw a magazine she was trying to read at Rosa, and asked her how she could be so absurd!

The confederates ended, as they usually did, in

gaining their point. It was at length agreed that the party should attire themselves in the very worst clothes they had, in order to appear as little conspicuous as possible in a scene not probably remarkable for refinement; and that they should call upon Dr Blossom, the chief physician of Doddington, either to escort them himself into the scene, or to provide a substitute —as if the Doctor had been a militia-man; and to Doddington accordingly they drove.

Rosa, in a straw bonnet and blue muslin frock, looked very like a pretty villager out for a holiday; and the character was further sustained by a little basket intended to hold fairings for Julius. But Lady Lee, also in a straw bonnet and plain dove-coloured shawl, looked as much like a fine lady as ever; while, as for Orelia, the only difference in her was that you would now have taken her for a potentate in disguise.

CHAPTER III.

They had a pleasant drive to Doddington. The lower part of the quiet country town seemed more deserted than ever, as they walked up the street accompanied by the Doctor. The few people whose business tied them down to their shops looked as if they would gladly have forsaken them to partake the pleasures of the fair; with the exception of a Methodist draper, who stood at his door with his arms straight down his sides and his nose in the air, revelling in the idea that he was not as other men are, fair-goers and sinners, and occasionally casting a stern glance up the street leading to the busy scene, as if he considered it the broad way that led to destruction. The stationer's shop, which Julius always entered with delighted expectation, and wandered with rapture through the treasures of toys and picture-books it contained, seemed a doleful every-day affair to him compared with the delight he anticipated in the region of the fair, whither he was now all eagerness to arrive.

This was a broad macadamised portion of the main street, having houses on one side only, the other being bordered by a field known as Luxon's Meadow, from the name of the proprietor of it, who kept a public-house hard by. None—not even the oldest inhabitant—could possibly, without having previously been present at a Whitsun Fair in Doddington, have recognised the street and meadow for the same. Both were glorified. The street contained within itself a smaller street made by covered stalls, whose proprietors invited the attention of passengers to heaps of toys, confectionary, and the like congenial wares, intermingled with more utilitarian stalls, where boots and shoes (for the manufacture of which Doddington was famous all over the country) were sold, hanging in strings like onions, and so numerous, that you would have fancied the people of that region must have been centipedes at the very least. Looking through the space left between one of these stalls, and another containing an inviting display of sweetmeats, Luxon's Meadow was seen—no longer the barren, somewhat dismal-looking field, more remarkable for the flourishing crop of dock-leaves and nettles it exhibited than for anything else; but a gorgeous pleasure-ground, where, amid wheelbarrows of nuts, families of jugglers, painted swings, and yellow peep-shows, rose proudly a travelling theatre, known as Powell's Pavilion, where

the actors, after appearing inside in melodramas which occupied about a quarter of an hour in the performance, came out upon the stage in front, in their magnificent dresses, and dazzled the populace by walking about there in pairs. Julius beheld with great wonder a drunken countryman, who had stuck fast in a crevice of the stage, assisted down the ladder to *terra firma* by a courteous warrior in a brass scaly surcoat of proof and a tin helmet.

In the street, opposite the meadow, was a long low show made of canvass, with an ornamental front and stage, whereon a merryandrew was delighting the populace. This merryandrew was the very Methusaleh of merryandrews: he was so old that he had long since lost his teeth ; and his mouth, having fallen in, left so little space between his nose and chin for the painting of his lips, that the lower one extended some little distance down his throat. Notwithstanding his advanced age, this patriarch showed some considerable agility, elevating occasionally in the air a pair of legs that seemed the very abode and stronghold of rheumatism, and walking on his hands. He wore a ruff round his neck, and rosettes in his shoes ; and one might almost have fancied that, having adopted these articles of costume when a youth in Elizabeth's time, he had stuck to them ever since. Besides being a green old age, his was also a motley old age, for he

wore a particoloured doublet and tight hose, painted in squares, so that, if he had been put in a mangle, and rolled out flat, you might have played chess on his thighs. And so, with many quips, conjuring tricks, and comical grimaces, this old gentleman was literally tumbling into his grave. On this stage extremes seemed to meet, for a child about Julius's age and size, dressed in a spangled doublet and white drawers, tumbled thereon, with a sad and serious aspect, in imitation of his aged associate.

Passing through these enchanted regions, a hoarse voice saluted the visitor—and a fat, red-faced, and red-whiskered man might be seen, standing on the front of his wooden van, which, turning down on hinges and resting on props, formed a stage whereon he exhibited hardwares of every description, produced from the interior of the vehicle, which was fitted up like a shop. This was the celebrated Cheap John, a man who, besides his character for brilliant imagination and wit—faculties patent to any observer who chose to stand within hearing of his jokes for a minute—enjoyed a shadowy but vast reputation as a pugilist, though it was evident, from his corpulence, that a single tap on the stomach from an antagonist must have caused him to burst like an egg. Like Orpheus, he charmed the very clods. Bumpkins who merely went to enjoy his facetiousness, found themselves, on depart-

ing, hampered with various sorts of hardware, which they didn't exactly know what to do with, and which they certainly never intended to buy. Few were proof against the magic of his eloquence, which drew, if not golden, yet copper, and occasionally silver opinions, from most of his listeners.

From the spot occupied by this orator, a glimpse might be caught of the greater splendours of the fair. Music from the brass band of the wild-beast show broke upon the ear, and the fluttering of vast pictures, elevated, like sails, on masts, caught the eye—indistinct, yet still imposing in the distance, and revealing, on closer view, wonders that presently deprived the spectator of all hope of peace of mind, till he had satiated his curiosity with a survey of the internal marvels of which they were the outward sign. In these works of art the lion Wallace fought the six dogs at Warwick; a white bear devoured a hapless polar navigator, whose tarpaulin hat was visible between the animal's stupendous and inexorable jaws; the authentic portrait of the wonderful Fat Boy smiled, in bland obesity, on that of the French Giant in the opposite caravan, who was represented as looking down from a great altitude on a wondering gentleman in a blue surtout and brass buttons, whose shirt-frill reached about the giant's knee, and who was supposed to be a person of fashion who had paid his

money for the pleasure of seeing him. The swelling of the canvass of these great pictures in the breeze imparted to the objects painted thereon a slow and solemn motion, which, giving a sort of unearthly life to their grim faces and steadfast attitudes, made them appear to Julius very awful.

Everything was charming to Julius. If the fairies he was so fond of hearing about had carried him in a winged chariot to their own country, he could scarcely have been more delighted. His friend Rosa had provided him with an immense painted trumpet, which had taken his fancy, and had also held him up to look in at the glass of a peep-show. This had merely whetted his appetite for sight-seeing; and immediately on arriving in front of the rows of caravans where the wild beasts were stationed, he became clamorous for a sight of them.

They did not, perhaps, come up to his ideal. He was a little disappointed at finding the lion so placable, for he merely winked at them as they passed in front of his den; the polar bear also declined showing any more than the rear of his person; while the Peruvian nightingale remained mythic as the phœnix, although Julius applied earnestly to a keeper in corduroy shorts and ankle-boots to help him to a sight of that singular bird. The man laughed, and, saying "Look here, master!" pointed to a pelican; but

Julius knew all about pelicans, and not only convicted the keeper of the attempted imposition, but gave him a short digest of pelican history from Buffon. Here we will leave him, making acquaintance with the monkeys, charmed at recognising the ostriches, and outrageous at not being permitted to ride on the zebra, while we look after other characters of our history.

Kitty Fillett, after being introduced by Mr Noble to all the shows, was refreshing herself, in that gentleman's society, in a neighbouring booth. Mr Noble, after having been very agreeable and attentive all the day, was now in a most unchristian and desperate state of mind. This was caused by the presence of a good-looking corporal of dragoons, who had lounged in, after frequently passing and repassing before them, apparently thinking much more of the too favourable and admiring glances which Kitty cast on him, than of the ire that was flashed to wither him from the eyes of Noble. The corporal was a tall, slender fellow, of a somewhat *roué* and dissipated aspect; his forage-cap was set jauntily on one side of his wavy black hair, his mustache was evidently nurtured like some rare exotic, and he had a waist, as Kitty said, like an hour-glass.

Miss Fillett's conduct was certainly aggravating. She had begun by whispering to Noble remarks on

the uniform and general appearance of the object of his wrath, and, totally regardless of the gruff and short replies vouchsafed, had taken occasion to enlarge on the charms of military people in general, and dragoons in particular.

"There's a hair about thim," said Kitty, mincing her words to suit the subject—"there's a hair about thim not met with out of the army. Their manners is generally ixquisite, and their—oh, did you ever see such a white hand, now he's took his gloves off?"

"D—n his hand!" muttered Noble.

"No gentleman's is whiter," pursued Kitty; "and his eyes—law, how they do sparkle!—don't they, Harry?"

"Do they!" said Harry, shortly; then, *sotto voce*, "I should like to bung 'em up."

"And isn't his jacket beautiful?" whispered the enthusiastic Fillett. "Look at the lace on the front."

"P'raps you may see it laced on the back presently," growled Noble, savagely grasping his stick, and unable longer to repress his displeasure. But Kitty pretended to think he was joking. She made nonsensical remarks, and then laughed loudly at them, to attract the attention of the Corporal, and establish an understanding with him; while he, switching his boot with his cane, glanced at her with a coolly critical air, as if he was used to that sort of thing.

How long Harry Noble's wrath might have taken to boil over, under these circumstances, is doubtful. Just as he was revolving in his mind some plausible reason for stepping up to the Corporal, and inviting him into the next field to settle their claims, Lady Lee's party came in front of the booth, stopt for a moment, in their way down the street, by the crowd gathered round a huge bumpkin, who, incited thereto by ale and approbation, was performing a hornpipe in hobnailed shoes, leaving deep impressions of the nails in the road at every step.

This disciple of Terpsichore, finding his efforts well received, had procured a partner whom he had danced into breathless exhaustion, and he was now looking round for a suitable fair one to supply her place. In his exalted mood, Orelia's style of beauty appeared to him most likely to do him credit, and he accordingly pranced up, with the grace and vigour of one of his own plough-horses, and seized her hand. Orelia snatched it away.

"Wretch!" cried she, looking at him like an insulted queen—"Begone!"

"The fellow's mad!" cried Dr Blossom—"get away, sir! Call a constable!" quoth the Doctor, authoritatively, to the crowd in general, on seeing the man persist in his design.

The dragoon Corporal, leaving his contemplation

of Miss Fillett, had lounged to the front of the booth, where he stood coolly scanning the ladies. He now stept forward, and, interposing between the flushed and angry Orelia and her pertinacious assailant, seized the man by the collar, and hurled him violently back.

The countryman was fully three stone heavier than the trim soldier, and, recovering himself, rushed at him in full confidence of utterly annihilating him with one swashing blow of his great fist. His brother bumpkins, unanimously indulging the same expectation, encouraged him by crying out, "Gi' ut un, Joe; d—n thee, gi' ut un!" and were proportionably astonished when the Corporal threw himself into an easy attitude, and, by what appeared to their unscientific eyes the mere straightening of his right arm, sent his big antagonist to the earth like a slaughtered ox.

A tremendous row ensued. Some comrades of the Corporal's, who were near, set to at once with a corresponding number of the countryman's friends, all actuated by a unanimous impulse. Two or three officers, seeing the red jackets gleaming fitfully amidst overpowering masses of corduroy and fustian, cast themselves into the fray, and were reinforced by a couple of Oxford men on a visit to their friends in the town, who, expecting to be ordained shortly, and to be debarred from the comfort of combating barge-

men in future, embraced the present opportunity with grateful promptitude. Amateurs of Doddington were equally ready to exert their prowess—showmen were affected by the contagious example—harlequins, descending from their stages, ranged themselves against rival Pantaloons, while Columbines screamed after them in vain; and the proprietor of the French Giant took the opportunity of settling a private and long-festering grudge with the owner of the Albino Lady.

The Corporal showed himself a paladin in courtesy no less than in valour. He carefully interposed his person as a shield to the ladies, and the fray streamed away on each side as from a rock. Still, they might have been sadly jostled, had not the venerable merry-andrew before mentioned hurried down his ladder, at the imminent risk of snapping his unfortunate old legs, and handed them up to his stage, out of harm's way.

Harry Noble, burning to avenge his wrongs on the dragoon, was meanwhile forcing his way through the crowd towards that redoubted personage, intending forthwith to disfigure permanently, by the bunging-up of eyes, loss of fore-teeth, and flattening of nose, the face that Kitty Fillett had found so charming. Whether these fell designs would have been executed, or whether Harry, coming for wool, might have

gone home shorn, is not known, for the duel did not take place. Just as Harry's furious face, glaring on the Corporal within a couple of yards, met the eye of the latter, and admonished him to look out for a fresh foe, a couple of horses' heads came between them.

"Hi! hi!" shouted the corpulent coachman, who drove the Lightning royal mail. "By your leave there!—make a lane, will ye? Give 'em a note, Jim" (to the guard).

The guard sounded his horn, and then flourished it, shouting, "Room for the mail!—make way there!" evidently lost in wonder at the effrontery of any person or persons daring to delay for an instant his Majesty's mail; while a passenger, who sat on the box-seat, said, "Drive into the infernal scoundrels!"

The coachman was by nature a choleric person, and his choler had been fed for many years with brandy-and-water, like a lamp. He could ill brook hindrances of any kind, and was scarcely to be stopt even by such decisive impediments as loss of linch-pins, impassable snow-drifts, and the like dispensations of Providence. Accordingly, having to choose between suppressing his wrath (which would certainly, by inducing apoplexy, have caused him to drop off his perch like an over-fed goldfinch) and venting it

forthwith, he chose the less fatal alternative, and touched up his leaders. Those noble animals, sidling and curvetting, with the traces over their backs, pushed on, and did great execution, terminating several pugilistic encounters with a suddenness that the most active Middlesex magistrate, assisted by the rural police, might have tried in vain to emulate. The warrior in the tin helmet, before alluded to, and a pugnacious harlequin who had attacked him, were prostrated in opposite directions. Harry Noble was sent reeling into the very arms of Kitty Fillett, who was shedding tears like a watering-pot; and other less eager belligerents quietly agreed to a cessation of hostilities, and cleared the way for the mail.

The Lightning was beginning to exchange its slow walk through the crowd for a slow trot, and the coachman's face was returning from deep ultramarine to its natural lake tint, when Lady Lee, casting her eyes upon the coach, called aloud, "Oh, Colonel Lee! Colonel Lee!"

The passenger on the coach-box turned, and, instantly recognising her ladyship perched on a stage within a yard or two of him, in company with her son, two young ladies, a merryandrew, and a juvenile tumbler, he did what all the people in the fair probably couldn't have done, for, by a word and a touch on

the arm, he caused the coachman to pull up while he descended; and, further, that impetuous charioteer, before proceeding on his way, respectfully touched his hat to him, as did the guard.

Bagot's first exclamation, on ascending the stage, was "God bless my soul!" Then, shaking Lady Lee's hand, and motioning with his head towards the aged merryandrew, he said, "You haven't joined the profession, have you, Hester?"—for Bagot was a man who could be pleasantly facetious with ladies.

"I'm so glad you're come," said Lady Lee; "you can take care of us as far as the hotel, and go home in the carriage. My dears, this is Colonel Lee; and these are my friends, Miss Payne and Rosa Young."

The Colonel, taking off his white felt hat, made a bow—rather a slang bow—to each, and then shook hands, first with Orelia, who gave him hers as if she expected him to go down on his knees and kiss it, and then with Rosa. He diffused round him a palpable halo, as it were, of brandy-and-water. He was dressed in the white hat just mentioned, a green neckcloth with white squares, a Newmarket cutaway, with a white greatcoat over it, and trousers buttoned at the ankles over drab gaiters. He had evidently been a good-looking man before his nose grew so

swollen, his forehead so flushed, his eyes so open and watery, and his under lip so protruding and tremulous. His hair was somewhat long at the sides and back, and grizzled to iron grey, as were his voluminous whiskers and the tuft on his under lip.

The Colonel, having shaken hands with them as aforesaid, and also with Julius, who plucked him by the skirts, and called him "Uncle Bag," said, "Suppose we imitate Miss O'Neil, and retire from the stage"—which they accordingly did, after acknowledging substantially the civility of the ancient merryandrew, who stood bowing before them, while the fixed smile painted on his spotted face entirely contradicted his deferential attitude, and gave to the spectators the idea that he was openly making fun of the whole party.

As they passed down the street to the hotel, Bagot frequently stopt to shake hands with people of all classes who came up to greet him. Farmers, whose grounds he sometimes shot over, held out their horny hands; Peter Pearce, a convivial shoemaker, left his stall, and danced a short distance down the street in front of them, to testify his satisfaction at the Colonel's arrival; Tom Jago, a wool-comber, who cared more for field-sports than for his trade, came up, touching his hat, to tell of some trampers having lately been seen netting the river for salmon; and

Mrs Susan Golightly, the buxom wife of an innkeeper, cast a merry glance from her black eyes as she welcomed the Colonel back to Doddington,—all of whom Bagot treated with a gracious and jocular familiarity, that fully maintained for him his position in the popular esteem.

CHAPTER IV.

Bagot's visits to the Heronry were, for the most part, regulated by sporting events. He was a regular attendant at all great race meetings, and spent here the intervals, especially if his funds were low. The state of these funds was almost entirely dependent on his adroitness or good fortune in betting or at play, for Sir Joseph's legacy had dwindled down to a minute fraction on the settling day of the very first Derby after the testator's death.

On the occasions of these visits, he and Lady Lee had always been entirely independent of each other. He had his own rooms, where he entertained his own companions, ordered his own meals, and led a free-and-easy bachelor life of it. He made himself useful by regulating the stable economy, and bringing the steward to book, as he termed it.

On the evening of his arrival, Bagot walked over to Monkstone, the house already described as stand-

ing across the river, within view of the windows of the Heronry; and, as Bagot was not accustomed to pay visits of ceremony or friendship, we may state at once that he had an object in view.

Monkstone had been purchased by an old gentleman, who, rising from low beginnings to considerable wealth, had conceived a wish, in his old age, to become the founder of a family. As he was an old bachelor, and had no intention of marrying, he cast about among his relatives for a suitable heir. Having selected a nephew, he took him into his house, and brought him up to consider himself the future successor to Monkstone; and, dying a few years after, left him his sole heir.

Mr Jonathan Dubbley, this fortunate inheritor, had been considerably neglected both by nature and education. He was far from bright originally, and the dull surface of his mind was covered, when his uncle adopted him, with many years' rust. At his uncle's death, his estate and income were such as to give him consideration in the county, and he suddenly found himself a prominent character in scenes to which he was totally unaccustomed. He was a grand-juryman—he was a magistrate and J.P. His tenantry made him a man of consequence at elections; and, to crown his greatness, he had this year been chosen High Sheriff.

On one point he now began to feel his deficiency more strongly than all the rest—he wanted a well-bred wife—he wanted to marry a woman who should possess qualities to form a light agreeable background to his own solid merits—one who should, as Mr Tennyson expresses it, set herself to him "as perfect music unto noble words"—the noble words being, in his case, four thousand a-year. After casting about among the eligible spinsters of his acquaintance, and taking counsel with the landlord of the Dubbley Arms and his own gamekeeper, he at length fixed upon Lady Lee as the most suitable match he could discover. She was known to be a woman of talent and striking address; anybody who had eyes could see she was handsome; and, moreover, she would be by no means a dowerless bride, a circumstance that weighed powerfully in the calculations of Squire Dubbley, who had been taught fully to appreciate the value of money, and who was both tolerably acute and very obstinate where his own interests were concerned. The grand obstacle to a declaration of his wishes was an insuperable bashfulness with which the Squire became afflicted when in the company of ladies of high degree, but which did not, however, affect him in his intercourse with the sex generally.

Squire Dubbley had a very great respect for

Colonel Bagot Lee—greater, perhaps, than for any other person—not altogether because Bagot was a sharp fellow, for there were fellows sharper than Bagot, of whom the Squire thought but little. In general, Mr Dubbley disliked people who showed any superiority to himself, which had the effect of narrowing his circle of esteemed friends considerably. When men shone, in his company, on subjects which he did not understand, he would abuse them dreadfully behind their backs—say to his intimates that people might call such-a-one clever, but he was a cursed bad shot—couldn't hit a hay-stack; or that he had no hand on a horse, and rode like a tailor; with divers other slanders. But Bagot's sharpness evinced itself in pursuits congenial to the Squire's tastes—in field-sports, in skill on the turf, and in knowledge of the dark corners of London life, to which he had last year introduced Dubbley, piloting him into various haunts, where the inexperienced Squire would probably have fared but ill in purse, person, and reputation, but for the protection of Bagot, who walked through all these fiery furnaces like a moral salamander. Bagot, too, had furnished him with many valuable hints for his conduct in his new sphere, and for the management of his property. These merits, added to a sort of jovial overbearing good-humour of Bagot's, caused the Squire, as before said, to regard

him with a much greater respect than he would have felt for a more respectable person.

He had not failed to hint to this potent ally (though in a somewhat distant and sheepish way) his admiration for Lady Lee. Bagot had at first laughed at him, but, finding the Squire's affections to be more seriously engaged than he had imagined, he began to consider in his own mind how he could best turn the circumstance to account. It was with the view of executing the result of his meditations that he now visited Monkstone, on the first day of his coming down into the country.

He found Mr Dubbley, just returned from rabbit-shooting, taking off his half-boots and gaiters in the hall. He was a good-looking man, about five-and-thirty, rather bald, with a cunning eye and an imbecile half-smile. On seeing Bagot come up the steps, the Squire ran towards him in his worsted stockings, with the knee-strings of his corduroy breeches dangling about his calves.

"'Pon my life, Colonel," said Mr Dubbley, "I never was so glad to see anybody. I was just thinking how the devil I was to get through the evening. Your presence quite survives me." The Squire meant *revives*, but his language was sometimes even less clear than his ideas.

"Dubbley, my boy, how goes it?" said Bagot.

"Been working the rabbits, eh? You look sound, wind and limb."

"Sound as a bell," said Squire Dubbley, "and most particular hungry. Just you go into the dining-room, Colonel, and wait while I wash my hands. I'll order another plate to be laid."

Bagot accordingly entered the dining-room. He did not fail to remark several alterations in the apartment. Some French (very French) prints had been removed. The extremely plain furniture of old Mr Dubbley's time was replaced by the productions of a London upholsterer. Some books, too—rare objects at Monkstone—in very grand bindings, lay scattered about. Bagot took up one—it was an illustrated Life of Napoleon. Presently the Squire entered at another door, bearing a cob-webbed bottle in each hand, and another under his arm.

"I stick to my old rule," said the Squire—"always go to the cellar myself. Why, a tippling butler might knock off the head of a bottle, and drink it up any time, if he had the keys, Colonel; and how should I be the wiser?—unless," added the Squire, thoughtfully, "unless I was counting the bottles all day long."

"You're a sharp fellow, Dubbley," said Bagot, who wanted to put him in good humour. "'Twould be a clever butler that could do you."

The Squire chuckled. "Yes," said he, "I'm pretty sharp. Yes, yes—sharp enough, by George! I get done sometimes, though. Ah, Colonel, I wish you had been here a little while ago. 'Pon my life, I never wished so much for anybody. Do you remember Sally Perkins?"

"What—the good-looking housemaid!" said Bagot. "Yes—deuced fine girl; you rather admired her, didn't you?"

"I gave her warning," said Mr Dubbley, "because, instead of minding her work, she spent most of her time going about to fairs and merrymakings; and I told her I should only give her half the wages we'd agreed upon, because she turned out so good-for-nothing. What do you think she said to that, now?"

"Don't know," said Bagot. "What *did* she say?"

"Why, she said," returned the Squire, "that if I didn't pay her double, she'd summon me, and swear that I had refused her her money out of revenge because she wouldn't let me make love to her."

"Oh!" said Bagot, drily.

"And I told her to go to the devil; but she went to a lawyer"—

"Quite a different course," said Bagot.

"And, by George!" said the Squire, "she made him believe her story. I'd have kicked against it—yes, I'd have gone to jail first—for the jade used to

skylark with half the parish, though she'd have nothing to say to me; but I wanted to keep the thing quiet, and I gave in. Certain people," said the Squire, laying his finger on his nose, and winking at Bagot, "might have heard of it."

"Certain people?" said Bagot, interrogatively.

"Ah," said the Squire, "these things sound queer to ladies. I might have felt ashamed before somebody we know—somebody you and I know," said the Squire, looking idiotically wise.

"Where did these books come from?" inquired Bagot, pretending not to notice the Squire's drift. "You don't mean to say you ever read anything now. What made you get that life of Napoleon?"

"Ah," said Mr Dubbley, "great traveller, Napoleon! Yes, I've begun to read. I felt my deficience. I've felt it a good while, but it has come plainer upon me lately. Last time I was in town I gave a bookseller an order to fill my shelves."

"Who selected your library?" asked Bagot. "Had the gamekeeper anything to do with it?"

"I left it to the bookseller," replied Dubbley. "I gave him the size of the shelves to an inch, and you'll find 'em quite full. They're all bound alike, too."

"Why, it must have been rather expensive," said Bagot, looking towards the volume. "All bound in Russia, eh?"

"Russia! No, d—n it, no," said the Squire, "they were all bound in London, every one of 'em; and I had to come down for 'em handsomely, as you say. You see," said the Squire, as they sat down to dinner, "one must read to have something to say in ladies' society. If 'twasn't for that, curse me if I'd ever look at a book."

"Which are you reading up for?" asked Bagot—"the housemaid or the cook? By gad, I expect, Dubbley, to see you marry the scullery-maid yet!"

"Eh—what?" said the Squire, changing colour (for he had much more confidence in Bagot's opinion than his own, even on such a point). "No, hang it, don't say that! Scullery-maid!—no, by George! nor dairy-maid neither," he muttered. "No, no, I thought you knew my mind better than that."

"I'll tell you what it is, Dubbley, my boy," said the Colonel, laying down his knife and fork, and looking at him, "if you don't mind what you're at, some sharp woman or other will take you in—some pretty servant-maid, whose sense of propriety is proof against a five-pound note. I'd engage to make any good-looking girl in the parish marry you before Christmas, if she'd only follow my instructions."

"For God's sake don't talk like that!—the thing's beyond a joke! Come, Colonel, you wouldn't be so unfriendly?" said Mr Dubbley, pushing away his plate,

and rubbing his bald forehead nervously with his napkin, as he thought of the Colonel's unbounded resources, all brought to bear upon his unfortunate self.

Bagot laughed. "If you're such a confounded spoon that you can't trust yourself, Dubbley," said he, "why don't you put yourself out of harm's way? Why don't you marry some respectable woman that would do you credit and keep you out of scrapes?"

"The very thing," said Dubbley, "the very thing I intend. I've been thinking of it this long while. What d'ye think now of a certain person—a certain person not very far off? Any chance for me, eh?"

"The very thing," said the Colonel; "nothing could be better. Handsome, accomplished, rich—what could be better? But there go two words to that bargain. You know that, don't you?"

"What—mine and hers, eh?" said the Squire, looking wise.

"Mine, I fancy, is more important than either," said Bagot, gravely.

"Why, I know you've great influence with her, Colonel. But, then, I always thought you a friend of mine."

"Well," said the Colonel, "you're not a bad fellow, Dubbley, I believe—though you did refuse to lend me that two hundred I wanted the last time I was down."

"Hadn't got it, upon my soul—couldn't have raised it without a mortgage, I'll take my solemn oath," said Mr Dubbley, with great warmth and some confusion; for he lied, and Bagot knew it.

"Pooh," said the Colonel, "I know, to a penny, the amount of the rents you had then lying in Doddington bank. But never mind; you're right to be sharp. Every man for himself, and God for us all! But I've something more to say to her ladyship's marriage than my mere relationship gives me a right to say. You know, if she marries without my consent, she forfeits her income and the place."

"But it won't do you any good to say no," said the Squire.

"Won't it, indeed! If she marries without my consent, part of what she forfeits comes to me," said the Colonel. "And you don't think me such a confounded fool as to give all this away to a man who looks so close after his own, and cares so little about his friends, as you!"

The Squire looked blank. He really didn't know what argument to set against these forcible ones. Bagot helped him to one.

"Now, on the other hand, there's this to be said: If she never marries, I shall be no better off than I am. I may keep her single, but that will do me no good. We shall be disobliging each other."

Mr Dubbley, after a minute's intense thought, got into this new position.

"And therefore," Bagot went on, "if I could find a man who would make it worth my while to say yes, why, perhaps yes would be said."

"What do you call worth your while?" asked the Squire.

"Ah," said Bagot, "that would be a point for future consideration. There are a good many preliminaries to be gone through before we come to that. For instance, I suppose her ladyship doesn't dream of you as a suitor yet. What d'ye think, now?—does she?"

"Why, no," said the Squire, "no—that is, I can't say. I call there now and then. I've sent her a good deal of game."

"You won't get on very fast without a little help, I suspect," said Bagot. "If Lady Lee was a chambermaid, now—but she's a devilish well-bred, exclusive, superior sort of person, with deuced high notions."

"Yes, by George!" said the Squire. "I know that; I'm as moute as a muce—I mean as mute as a mouse—in her company. But I should get over that. However, give me a lift, and—and we'll see about the two hundred, Colonel," he added.

Bagot shook his head.

"Two hundred might have been all very well when I asked you," said he, "but twice two hundred wouldn't

serve me now. The fact is, I'm infernally dipped—let in at that cursed Spring Meeting."

The Squire fidgeted in his chair, and glanced nervously at him. Presently he rose, and, unlocking his writing-desk, took out some slips of paper—promissory notes of Bagot's—and began to enumerate them.

"Fifty last December twelvemonth," said he—"a hundred more in April—a hundred and seventy-five more, up to last Christmas—making, with interest—"

"Interest, be hanged!" roared Bagot. "Put up paper! I vow to heaven, you look like some infernal Jew money-lender preparing to foreclose. As to the other five hundred, Dubbley, I wouldn't trouble you on any account. Young Crackenthorpe of Rosemead will lend it me in a minute. He's a trump, that fellow, when he can serve a friend."

"Ah," said the Squire, packing up his bills, much relieved, "I'm sure he will, with pleasure. He's a rich fellow, Crackenthorpe; and if he says he hasn't the money, don't you believe him. I heard him bragging the other day that he had a loose thousand or two to invest."

"Yes," said Bagot, "a regular trump; a devilish creditable sort of fellow, too, to be connected with. I hear he's been casting his eyes in a certain direction lately. Her ladyship might do worse than take a fine

gentlemanly young fellow like that, with good expectations."

Verbum sapientibus sufficit. If Mr Dubbley had been the wisest of men, a word could not have better sufficed him. He felt that Bagot had a screw on him, and was turning it.

"By the by," he stuttered, "now I think of it, I wouldn't advise you to have any dealings with Crackenthorpe. No, no, Colonel, don't go to him for money; they say he's got cursed stingy lately—no getting a sixpence out of him. Why, 'pon my soul, I'd rather lend you the money myself, if I possibly could, than let you go to the fellow. Just wait while I look at my banker's book"—which he pretended to consult accordingly.

"Good, by Jove!" said Bagot to himself, rolling his red eye after him, with an inward chuckle. "If he parts with five hundred so easily, I foresee he will be a very pretty annuity to me. Good, indeed!—better than I expected."

And as he rode homeward that night, slapping the pocket that contained Mr Dubbley's check for the five hundred (in exchange for which another promissory note had been added to the little roll of them already in the Squire's writing-desk), he repeated to himself, "Better than I expected."

CHAPTER V.

THE next morning, Bagot, who was, when in the country, a tolerably early riser, issued forth from the house before breakfast, on his way to the stables.

The sun had been up two hours before, and was now looking warmly over some tall drooping ash-trees on to the southern entrance. Bagot stood and basked for a minute there.

It was a fresh still morning. There had been a shower in the night, and a rustling might be heard amid the grass of the lawn, as of drops penetrating. Thrushes were piping busily in the shrubbery, May-flies were on the wing amid the grass, butterflies hovvered above the old-fashioned flowers,—heart's-ease, stocks, lilacs, and gillyflowers—whose mingled fragrance came fresh and cool upon the sense. Bagot contributed his mite to the general perfume by smoking a cigar, and exhaling with the smoke an odour of brandy; for he was very shaky in the

morning until he got his dram, and would sometimes cut his chin dreadfully in shaving.

The beauty of the morning was in great measure thrown away upon Bagot. He knew no more about the witchery of the soft blue sky than Peter Bell. The verdure that gave him most pleasure, next to that of the race-course, was the green cloth of the billiard-table. The voice of the marker calling, "Red plays on yellow," was more musical to him than the carol of all the thrushes that ever piped. He stood there in the sunlight like a night-lamp that had been left unextinguished, murky and red, in the eye of the golden and scented morning.

He glanced around him as he stood smoking, with his hands in his flapped skirt-pockets—looked upward at the brick front of the house, with its projecting turrets, its deep diamond-paned, stone-framed windows, and balustraded parapet—looked around at the thick shrubbery, where the uppermost laurel-leaves glanced yellow amid their dark-green, glossy brethren, as the morning light slanted in—and followed some outward-bound rooks in their flight over the lawn, and across the river, where a solitary fly-fisher was wading to his middle, till they reached the village, where other rooks of congenial temperament came out from the trees and joined them. And

having looked thus with his outward eyes, without seeing much of it with his inner—for his busy head was now, as generally, occupied with other matters—he walked along two sides of the house, and through the shrubbery, to the stables.

Harry Noble and a boy were busy here about the horses; and Kitty Fillett had stolen away from her mistress to try and soften Mr Noble, whom she had found steeled against all her wiles and attempts at mollification on the previous evening.

Bagot caught Kitty by the chin, as she started at his footstep, and attempted to make off; and, holding the chin between his finger and thumb, he stood looking at her simpering face, not saying anything to her at first, by reason of his continuing to retain his cigar between his teeth, while his lips separated in an approving smile.

"Baggage!" quoth the Colonel, presently, taking his left hand from his coat-pocket, and removing the obstructive cigar without relinquishing his hold of the chin with the right—"how the deuce d'ye think men are to do their work with that handsome saucy face of yours looking at them? Can't you let the fellows alone for five minutes together?—ha, slut!"

"Indeed, sir, I don't want no fellows," said Miss Fillett, primly; "I merely kim to look at the horses."

"Horses!" roared Bagot, with a laugh, "you never

looked at a horse in your life if he hadn't a man on his back—you know you didn't. By the bye, I saw you yesterday at the fair, Kitty—here's a fairing for you—something to buy ribbons with."

Kitty dropt a curtsey as she pocketed the brace of half-crowns.

"How does your mistress pass the time now?" asked Bagot. "What's the new dodge? Is she chemical, or botanical, or geological, or what?"

"We've been a little astromical lately," said Miss Fillett. "But my lady's a deal more lively now since the two young ladies kim. They're always together."

"Always together!" thought Bagot; "that won't do. How am I ever to get in a word if she always has these others at her elbow to back her up? That won't do at all;" (then aloud,) "What are the young ladies like, Kitty?"

"Very nice young ladies," said Kitty. "Miss Payne gave me a beautiful silk dress last week, as good as new; and, o' Wednesday, Miss Rosa—"

"Hang your dresses!" quoth Bagot; "I didn't ask what they'd given you, but what they were like. Have they got any fun in 'em?"

"Indeed, they have plenty," said Miss Fillett, nodding her head four distinct times. "They're as lively as kittens, and that's the truth."

"Does your mistress ride now?" asked Bagot.

"Not since the young ladies have been here, sir. They don't ride, and my lady stays with 'em for company."

"I must look to this," said Bagot to himself, as, resuming his cigar, and releasing Miss Fillett, he entered the stable. "And, oh!" (calling after Kitty) "tell her ladyship that, with her permission, I'll have the honour of breakfasting with her."

The stable was not so well filled now as it had been in Sir Joseph's days. Bagot cared little for hunting. Stalls labelled "Valiant," "Coverley," "Bob," and "Bullfrog," were vacant, and the place of those hunters knew them no more. But the brown carriage-horses, Duke and Dandy, still stood side by side; Lady Lee's grey thoroughbred, Diana, turned her broad front and taper muzzle to look at the comer, and several others were ranged beyond.

Noble was polishing some harness, and a boy near was removing a bucket from a stall, where he had been washing the feet of a brown cob.

"Who's that?" inquired Bagot of Noble, pointing at the boy.

"The gardener's son, sir," said Noble, pausing in his occupation to touch his cap; "he's been here these three weeks."

"Lift that near hind-leg, boy," said Bagot, pointing at the cob. The boy obeyed.

"D'ye call that dry?" said the Colonel. "Don't you know it's enough to give greasy heels to a horse to leave him in that way, you careless young villain? Now look you," pursued the Colonel sternly, but quite calmly, "I'm a good deal about the stables, and if ever I see you leave a horse that way again, I'll lick your life out. How's her ladyship's mare, Noble?"

"She's a little sore in the mouth, from the boy taking her out with a twisted snaffle," said Noble, "but she'll be all right to-morrow. The boy's getting on — he'll do better soon, sir," said Noble, good-naturedly, seeing the Colonel's eye fixed fiercely on the boy.

"He'd better," said the Colonel grimly. "I'll put a twisted snaffle in *his* mouth." And here I may remark that Bagot, in his care and affection for that noble animal, the horse, regarded stable-boys generally as a race of Yahoos, upon whom any neglect towards the superior creature they tended was to be instantly visited with unsparing severity. Accordingly this morning saw the commencement of a series of precepts, threats, and veterinary aphorisms, which continued during Bagot's stay, and nearly drove the unfortunate boy out of his senses, but which, it is justice to add, had the effect of improving the economy of the stable wonderfully.

"And this is the filly, eh?" said Bagot, strolling up to a loose-box, and looking at a well-bred, handsome, somewhat leggy bay, that stood therein. "How does she go?"

"Rather hot and fidgety," said Noble, "but her paces first-rate, sir. Canters like an arm-chair, and walks fast, when you can get her to walk."

"Wants a light hand, eh?" said the Colonel.

"Yes, sir," said Noble, "I should say she'd go well with a lady."

"Put the saddle on her and bring her out," said Bagot, casting away the end of his cigar. "I'll try her now. It wants half an hour to breakfast."

Lady Lee and her friends assembled at the usual hour in the breakfast-room.

"We must wait for Colonel Lee," said her ladyship; "he is going to join us this morning."

"Why wasn't he at dinner, yesterday?" inquired Rosa.

"You mustn't expect to see much of him," said Lady Lee; "that is, unless you are anxious for gentlemen's society, and tell him so."

"And if we are," said Orelia, putting out her lip, "what would he be among so many?"

"His coming down to the Heronry never makes much difference to me," said Lady Lee. "The Colonel cares as little for flowers and literature as I do

for race-horses and Cuba cigars, so that we haven't much in common. But here he comes."

Bagot entered with his usual swaggering bow and betting-ring courtesy.

"Ladies, I salute you," said Bagot, putting his fingers to his lips and waving them in the air, as a salutation general. Bagot tinselled over his natural groundwork of coarse humour with scraps of theatrical politeness, when in ladies' society. "Gad," he continued, as he drew a chair to the breakfast-table, "I'm reminded at this moment of a nunnery I once visited in Spain; the lady abbess was young, and not unlike Hester—but, by Jove, the nuns couldn't boast so much beauty among the whole sisterhood as I see before me" (bowing to Orelia and Rosa, with his hand on his left waistcoat-pocket). "Luckily, I miss here, too, the dolefulness of aspect that characterised the poor things."

"Dear me!" said the sympathetic Rosa, "why did they look unhappy?"

"Probably for the love of heaven," said Orelia, sarcastically.

"Yes, the elderly ones, my dear Miss Payne; but the young ones, probably, for the love of man," returned Bagot, with a nod and a chuckle. "Ah, young ladies, 'tis the same all the world over; you may shut yourselves up in convents or in country houses, but

you can't keep out the small boy with wings—he's about somewhere at this moment, I've no doubt," lifting the lid of the mustard-pot, as if he expected to find a cupid hidden there, but it was only to make his devilled bone a little hotter.

"You'll hardly believe us," said Lady Lee, "when we tell you that the subject of love has scarcely once been mentioned among us."

"God bless me!—how silent you must have been!" said the facetious Colonel. "But that's wrong; you should always tell one another your love secrets; bottled affection is apt to turn sour."

"Now what *can* you know of the tender passion, Colonel?" said Lady Lee; "and yet, my dears, you hear how he philosophises about it, as if he were really acquainted with the sentiment."

Bagot reddened. He always suspected her ladyship of feeling for him a disdain which she did not care to conceal, and which, perhaps, really did exist, though the display of it was unintentional. It oozed out so unconsciously to herself, that, in a less clever person than her ladyship, he would probably have failed to notice it; but believing that she possessed satirical power, and feeling that there was no great congeniality between them, he frequently detected a latent disparagement in speeches which, coming from any one else, he would have taken either in a playful

or a literal sense. So, after a minute's silence, during which he was struggling with choler, which he felt it would be unprofitable to exhibit, he changed the subject.

"I'm sorry to find you've left off riding lately, Hester," said he. "Diana is getting as fat as a Smithfield prize pig, and I wonder you're not just the same. What exercise do you take?"

"We walk," said Lady Lee, "and drive."

"Walk and drive!" quoth Bagot. "Women crawl like spavined snails along the terrace, and get into a carriage that goes as easy as an arm-chair, and call that exercise. Riding is the only thing to keep ladies in health and condition. Besides, there are lots of places worth seeing around here too far to walk to, and inaccessible to a carriage; but how pleasant it would be to ride there!"

"But Orelia and Rosa have never ridden in their lives," said Lady Lee.

"Time they should begin," answered Bagot. "I've been trying the bay filly this morning, and I'm convinced she would carry Miss Payne (who, I'm sure, has capital nerve) to admiration. I'm going over to Doddington to-day to see Tindal, the major of the dragoons there, an old friend of mine, and I'll ask him to let his rough-rider come over and give your young friends a lesson. What d'ye say to that, young ladies?"

Both Rosa and Orelia were charmed at the prospect, and began to think Colonel Lee a very pleasant person. So it was agreed they should all drive over to Doddington, where the ladies had some shopping to do, and that the Colonel should then arrange with the Major about their riding lessons.

CHAPTER VI.

The detachment of dragoons stationed in Doddington was assembled at a dismounted parade that morning, to listen to an oration from the commanding officer, Major Tindal.

Other people were assembled there besides the troops. The yard of the principal hotel, where the parade was held, was thronged with admiring spectators. A week's familiarity with the cavalry had by no means bred contempt in the minds of the inhabitants of Doddington. Their hearts still thrilled to the sound of the stable-trumpet; at the march of the squadron through the streets, on its way to exercise, customers were neglected and business at a standstill, until the last horse-tail had disappeared round the corner of the Butter-market; and soldiers, appearing singly in the town, became each the nucleus of a small reverential crowd, swelling in magnitude like a snowball as it advanced. Their spurs, their

mustaches, the stripes of their trousers, were objects with the sight of which the populace found it impossible to satiate itself.

Accordingly, the troops were now the centre of a large circle, formed by apprentices who had deserted their trades; master-workmen, who, coming to look for them with fell intent, had forgotten their wrath, and "those who came to scold remained to see;" servant maids, who, running out on errands, with injunctions to be quick, had heard the trumpet, and been drawn as by magical power within its influence; ostlers and waiters, utterly reckless of their duty towards their neighbour; truant schoolboys in corduroys, with Latin grammars, geographies, and books of arithmetic slung at their backs, and whose pockets bulged with tops and green apples; young milliners, all curls and titter and blush; and paupers receiving out-door relief, who, quitting the spots where they usually basked away their time, like lazzaroni, came up, some with crutches, some without, and having a blind man in their company, to satisfy their military ardour.

The Major came slowly on parade, his hands crossed behind him, his spurs and scabbard clanking, his face stern. The crowd made a larger circle, and some little boys fled from his path—one or two, who stumbled in their haste, not pausing to rise again, but grovelling out of reach upon their hands and knees, expect-

ing nothing else than to be immediately decapitated or run through the body. The spectators were prepared for anything of a martial nature, and when he called the parade in a short sharp voice to "Attention," they half expected to see him draw his sword, and go through the cuts and guards—a proceeding which, far from appearing singular to them, would greatly have enhanced their respect. However, the Major didn't do anything of the sort. Standing in front of the line, with his left hand on his sword-hilt, he commenced his address, which may be considered a pretty fair specimen of military oratory.

"Men," said he (and as he spoke you might have heard a pin drop), "you—that is, some of you—have been acting disgracefully. You were sent here to preserve order, and you have been the first to set an example of disorder. You have abused my indulgence in allowing you to partake of the amusements of yesterday, and you have brought infernal discredit on the King's service in the eyes of the inhabitants. If I can discover who began the affray yesterday, in the fair, let them look out!—I'll make an example of them! If I can't discover them, I'll punish the whole detachment—I will, by G—d!"

There was a momentary pause, and the Major was about to recommence, when the Corporal of whom we have made mention stept to the front.

"I was the man, sir," said the Corporal, with military brevity.

"I'm sorry to hear it, Corporal Onslow. You are under an arrest—fall in, sir. Officers," said the Major, touching his cap, and the officers, touching theirs, fell out; — "Sergeant-major, dismiss the parade."

The Corporal saluted, and fell back. A whisper passed about among the populace—they were about as well informed as civilians generally are on points of military justice; and if the Corporal had been forthwith blindfolded with a handkerchief, caused to go on his knees, and then and there shot, it would perhaps have excited more awe than surprise.

During this scene, the party from the Heronry had been looking on from the balcony of the inn; and Bagot Lee, seeing the parade was over, chose this time to go up and greet his friend the Major.

Rosa Young had recognised the Corporal immediately as Orelia's defender, and heard the Major's words with horror. Orelia, however, was much too magnificent a personage to recognise a man in the Corporal's station of life, however good-looking he might chance to be.

"Orelia, did you hear—did you hear?" cried Rosa; "you're not going to allow them to punish him, are you, Orelia?"

"What did he say?" asked Orelia, who had been surveying the scene with a superb air, as if all the soldiers were hers, and brought there to be reviewed by her, before marching away to die in her cause.

"Why, they're going to punish him because he beat the man who wanted to dance with you yesterday, in the fair;—oh, if you don't stop them, I shall go myself," cried Rosa, preparing to rush down into the yard.

"Stop!" cried Orelia, "this mustn't be,—I'll go myself. Of course, it must be explained and stopt," and she marched off.

Rosa watched her as she walked across the yard, and noticed the look of surprise on the Major's face, as his conversation with Bagot was interrupted by the approach of the stately young lady. He listened courteously to her for a minute, and then called out, "Corporal Onslow!"

The Corporal came up with the same unconcerned air as before, and saluted.

"I'm glad," said the Major, "to find that your good character, far from being forfeited, is rather heightened, by the circumstance that took place: the lady you protected desires to thank you;—you are released, of course."

"And, with my thanks, may I beg you to accept

this?" said Orelia, holding out a hand in which gold was heard to chink.

The Corporal bowed low over the hand, but did not offer to touch it. "It was enough reward for him," he said, "to have been of the slightest service."

Orelia pressed it on him without effect. "I must study how to reward you in some other way," she said at length.

"It would be easy," the gallant Corporal replied; "a single word——"; and then, as if remembering the Major's presence, he drew himself up, saluted and walked off, leaving his reply unfinished.

"A strange sort of fellow that," said the Major as he departed; "we can make nothing of him. A capital soldier, and the best rider, by far, in the regiment,—but queer, very queer. He has nothing to say to the rest of the men, when off duty—never had a comrade;—and the fellow's language and manners are really deuced good, and quite above his station."

"Rides well, does he?" said Bagot; "perhaps he would suit my book. I was going to presume on our old acquaintance to prefer a request, in behalf of this and another fair young lady, for one of your men to give them a little instruction in riding."

"The very man," said the Major; "and he'll be glad enough of the employment," he added, in a low tone, to Bagot; "for, between you and me, I believe

the fellow is some wild slip of good family, and he'll be delighted to get away from the barrack-yard, which doesn't suit him at all."

"That sort of thing is more frequent than people fancy," returned Bagot. "I remember, when I was in the Guards, we enlisted a sprig of nobility once; but our honourable friend turned out a shocking vagabond, and we were under the painful necessity of flogging him. Your Corporal is certainly rather a striking-looking fellow."

"I saw him just after he was enlisted," said the Major. "He looked uncommonly gentlemanlike, and wore deuced well-made clothes, though, I fancy, there wasn't much in the pockets of them. He shall attend the ladies whenever you think proper. And, upon my honour," added the gallant Major, turning to Orelia, "I envy the fellow his employment. I wish I was a rough-rider myself, Lee," — whereat Bagot chuckled.

These few words of the Major's served to invest the Corporal with a sudden romantic interest in the eyes of Orelia. The service he had done her the day before, little thought of when supposed to have been rendered by an inferior, and capable of being rewarded by money, appeared in a new and graceful light as the act of an unfortunate gentleman. And

the difficulty of expressing her gratitude, in a manner suitable either to his apparent or his supposed quality, made her rate the favour above its value, and caused her thoughts frequently to recur to him.

Meanwhile the dragoon officers looked on, envying Tindal, who, in this infernal stupid hole of a country quarter, had made the acquaintance of such a splendid-looking girl. They followed her with their eyes as she walked away, and watched her as she came out on the balcony and rejoined Rosa and Lady Lee there; and, while they stroked their mustaches, they uttered opinions on the party much warmer and more favourable than the customary *nonchalance* and pococurantism of military criticism would have sanctioned.

"Magnificent girl, certainly," said Captain Sloperton, a handsome exquisite; "but I prefer that pale one, with the chestnut hair,—so deuced thoroughbred, you know."

"Oh! deuced thoroughbred!" echoed Cornet Suckling, who, in his eagerness to propitiate, would agree with anybody.

"Fine points about them, no doubt," said Lieutenant Wylde Oates, "but they're in too grand a style for me. Hang me if I should know what to say to either of 'em. Give me that plump, little, rosy beauty, for my taste."

"Right, old fellow," said Harry Bruce, Mr Oates'

particular associate; "she's a charming little thing;—but there, they're going,—you may put away your eye-glass, Sloperton. By Jove! I feel as if the drop-scene had fallen at the opera."

Though the parade had broken up, the crowd still lingered. Some sanguine spirits, perhaps, were yet of opinion that justice was about to be done on the offending Corporal. Some were unable to tear themselves away from the contemplation of the officers, as they remained chatting in a group. Nobody thought of leaving, so long as a vestige of gold lace or a single spur was to be seen. The royal mail had driven up to the hotel, and stopt to change horses, but the ostlers had decamped to look at the military, and the guard was obliged to harness the abandoned team with his own august hands; while the stout coachman, instead of finding an obsequious stable-boy ready to catch the reins, and an admiring mob of idlers waiting on each oracular word that fell from his inspired mouth, stood actually alone, in his top-boots and broad-brimmed hat, in the porch of the hotel, bursting with suppressed wrath. During the next stage he touched up a lazy wheeler with the double thong so effectually, that the astonished animal took the whole draught of the coach upon itself for a league or two; but he never uttered a word for five-and-forty miles. At the end of that

space, being then nearly through the next county, he turned his head half round, and said to the guard—

"Here's a pretty go, Jim!—what the blazes shall we come to next!" after which, he uttered a short derisive laugh; and the guard, who, from long travelling that road, was better acquainted with his character and trains of thought than most people, knew that he was referring to the desertion of the ostlers and loungers at Doddington, and expressing his contempt for their military enthusiasm, and pity for their vulgar taste.

CHAPTER VII.

BEFORE noon on the day of the first riding lesson, Bagot came into the drawing-room and announced the arrival of the Corporal. In expectation of him, Rosa and Orelia were already equipped for the saddle.

"By Jove!" said Bagot, "either that riding-habit, Miss Payne, or the hat and plume, or both, are amazingly becoming to you. Stick to the costume, Miss Payne, stick to it by all means, whenever you are bent on conquest."

The opinion was just. Orelia certainly looked magnificent as she descended the oak staircase, holding her whip and the folds of her gathered skirt in her left hand. The hat and plume suited well the style of her face, and made her look like a graceful brilliant cavalier.

The steeds were ready in front of the house, the bay filly fretting a little, and impatient of the bit.

The Corporal had dismounted, and was holding his troop-horse by the bridle. As the ladies appeared, he took off his forage-cap, and bowed with a great deal of grace.

"Now then, Miss Payne," said Bagot, going up to the filly, and patting her, "don't be frightened."

Frightened!—frightened indeed! as if she ever could be frightened! Such was the meaning conveyed in the scornful look that Bagot got in reply to his speech of intended encouragement. She placed her foot in Bagot's right palm, as if she had been treading on the neck of her man Friday. The filly snorted, backed, trod on Noble's toe, but Orelia, with a spring and a lift, was in the saddle; and the filly, her nose compressed by Noble's hand, stood fast while the stirrup was being adjusted—an operation that afforded desultory glimpses to the lower world of a perfectly enchanting leg, and gave Bagot such satisfaction that he needlessly prolonged it, (not the leg, nor the stirrup, but the operation.)

Rosa had mounted Lady Lee's favourite, Diana, without difficulty, though the little lady was somewhat nervous. Then the Corporal was about to vault on his trooper, when Bagot called out to stay him. "We'll find you a better horse than that, Corporal," said he; then whispering Orelia—"'tis just as well, before intrusting him with so valuable a charge, to

find out if he's qualified to take care of it. Fetch out the Doctor, boy. Did you put the curb on him?" said he to Noble.

"All right, sir," said Noble; "you couldn't push a straw under it, 'tis so tight. He'll be a good un, sir, if he sits him," said Noble, grinning somewhat maliciously at the thought of seeing his rival unhorsed.

The Doctor, a somewhat cross-made but powerful chestnut, made his appearance from the stables at a smart trot, lifting the boy, who ran beside him hanging at the reins, nearly off his legs, and switching his tail and snorting.

"Now then, Corporal!" said the Colonel.

The Corporal glanced at the curb, which he saw the horse wouldn't endure, and put his finger on it.

"Up with you!" cried Bagot, with an impatient jerk of the head.

Without a word, the Corporal was in the saddle—not through the medium of the stirrup, but by a light vault that placed him at once in his seat: the stirrups had purposely been left too short.

"Quit his head, boy!" said Bagot.

The boy let go, and swiftly retreated several paces, for he anticipated mischief. The Doctor had such a notorious prejudice against a curb, that nobody at all acquainted with him ever thought of even showing him any other bridle than a snaffle. In a moment

he was in the air, executing a great variety of feats, of a nature much more curious to a spectator than gratifying to riders in general; but the dragoon was "demi-corpsed" with his steed, and sat him, though without stirrups, as if on parade.

Presently the brute paused, with his fore-legs out and his ears back; then, without warning, he rose in the air on his hind-legs. For a moment he stood poised, perpendicularly; and the Corporal employed that critical moment to slip his left foot in the stirrup, and to throw back his right leg over the saddle, thus standing upright, side by side, with the horse in the air, holding by the cheek of the bridle. For a moment it was doubtful which way they would fall. Rosa shrieked, and even Orelia turned a little pale; while a shrill scream was emitted by Miss Fillett, who was looking on, privily, from behind a window-curtain: then, after a paw or two, the Doctor sunk forward on his fore-legs, and at the same moment the Corporal, recrossing his saddle, was in his seat before the animal's feet touched the ground.

"He'll do!" cried Bagot. "Off with the curb, boy."

The boy sprang forward, and unhooked the links of the offending chain. In a moment the Doctor stood like a lamb.

In his excitement at the scene, Noble had quitted

the bay filly; and the filly, in emulation of the Doctor's proceedings, became unruly. Bagot jumped to catch her head; but she bounded out of his reach, and, feeling no check from the loose reins, made off at half-speed down the lawn.

Orelia did not scream in this, to her, novel predicament, nor lose her own head, though she had lost the filly's. She sat far steadier than could have been expected, and even succeeded in catching her reins. But the filly was away; and in front was a ha-ha—a broad ditch faced with brick, dividing the shrubbery from the lawn—and for this she made.

"Curse the brute!" cried Bagot, making two frantic steps after the runaway; and then, stopping short in despair, "She'll fall—she'll fall, as sure as fate!" —a prophecy that was dismally echoed by a shriek from Rosa.

But a potent auxiliary was at hand. The Corporal, gathering up his reins, had struck his long-rowelled dragoon spurs into the Doctor, and gone off at speed. Orelia was close by the ditch when he reached her; he had hoped to catch her rein, and turn her steed from the dangerous obstacle—but it was too late. The filly sprung, and cleared the ditch, but the shock unseated her inexperienced rider, who, thrown on her horse's neck, must evidently, at the next stride, have come violently to the ground. But the strong arm of

the Corporal was, at that critical moment, passed round her waist, and restored her to her seat. He had cleared the ditch almost at the same moment as herself; and, now catching the filly's rein, before she had recovered from her own astonishment at performing such a feat, he checked her pace to a walk.

"Bravo!" roared Bagot: "the fellow's a Centaur. Tip-top riding, by Jove! Boy, open the gate, and let 'em back. One jump of that sort's enough."

Orelia was a little pale when they rode back, but kept her nerve unshaken.

"Dear Reley," said the trembling Rosa, "you mustn't ride that creature—oh, you mustn't. Get off, my dearest Reley."

"Don't be silly," said Orelia, coldly. "Come, sir" (to the Corporal), "shall we begin our ride?"

"Game, by gad!" said the admiring Bagot—"game to the backbone. Yes, yes, go on—we can trust you with him. Take up the martingale rein—so!—show her how, Corporal. A pleasant ride to you." And Bagot flourished his white hat after them, as they all three went down the road, and then returned to the house, to have a little talk with Lady Lee.

She was seated at the piano, playing and singing a song of her own writing and composition. Bagot had not much ear for music, nor was his soul tuned particularly to harmony; but he felt a sort of plea-

sure, at first, in hearing her magnificent voice pour forth the melody, and considerately waited near till it was finished; not very patiently, however, for he cleared his throat several times loudly, and shuffled with his feet impatiently on the hearth-rug.

Having finished her song, Lady Lee did not sing any more, but went on playing. This sort of unconscious disregard of him ("treating him, begad," as he said, "as if he was nobody") had frequently annoyed Bagot, and the irritation he felt gave his thoughts a somewhat bilious hue.

In the conversation which he presently opened, he had two objects in view, both suggested by his late successful interview with Mr Dubbley.

He wanted to induce Lady Lee to receive that gentleman's visits, with so much toleration as should suffice to impress the Squire with a belief that he might eventually succeed in his suit. At the same time, he did not wish her to give Mr Dubbley enough encouragement to elicit a proposal from him, as it would certainly be followed by a refusal, and consequent loosening of Bagot's influence with that gentleman, when thus reduced to despair.

Secondly, Bagot considered that Dubbley was not the only man in the world who might be inclined to give value for his countenance in the matter; that it would, therefore, be necessary, as a preliminary to the

forming of such lucrative acquaintances, to induce her ladyship to go into society. Lovers would, no doubt, appear—would be given to understand that Bagot's consent was necessary, and would, of course, as men of the world, see the necessity of propitiating him. If she should take a fancy to a man who was not disposed to be liberal, Bagot might always withhold his consent, and thus, in the event of her marriage, richly indemnify himself.

This may seem to many persons who are unused to the society of knowing men, trained to sharpness in the same school as Bagot, a somewhat heartless calculation. But Bagot was so imbued with the spirit of p. p. bets and Jockey Club rules, that, though far from an ill-natured man, he looked on all matters in which he had any interest in a sort of turf and billiard-room light. If he held honours, why shouldn't he count them? If his adversaries played badly, or didn't know the game, that was their look-out. His business was to win if he could.

Such certainly was, in plain language, the substance of the thoughts that influenced him. But nobody thinks in plain language, and hence comes half the error and misconduct in the world. If we could but think in words, how many a shadowy plausibility would fade to nothing—how many a veiled iniquity take shape repulsive and shameful! Bagot, accus-

tomed to look straight at his own interest, which he could always see a long way off, dropt out of sight the dirty roads that led to it.

"You look paler, Hester," said he, "than when I was down last. You shut yourself up too much. How do you pass your time?—pleasantly?"

"Oh, very pleasantly," said Lady Lee, in a half-absent way, as was natural to her of late, when not conversing on topics, or with people, that much interested her. "That is" (waking up), "just as usual."

"And when is this seclusion to end? As I said, you shut yourself up too much. To be sure, I'm not a woman—thank goodness, no" (*sotto voce*); "but I can only say, a month of this sort of life would play the very deuce with me. Suppose, now, you were to begin to see a little company. What d'ye say to a ball—or a fête in the grounds—or some way of collecting your friends about you?"

Lady Lee elevated her shoulders wearily, and put out her lip at the idea.

"You really ought," said Bagot, "to make an effort to break through these quiet habits. Hang me, if you mightn't as well be a fly, and stick to the ceiling, as live in this way. What's the use of your accomplishments, if nobody knows them? What's the use of your reading, if you bottle it all up? Besides, there are those two young friends of yours dying, I

daresay, poor things, for a little society and amusement. 'Pon my soul, I really don't think it hospitable to keep the unfortunate girls here, and allow them no diversion."

"I am much mistaken," said Lady Lee, "if more society would make them any happier here, or if the wish for it ever enters their heads. You have no idea how pleasantly the time passes with us. I only wish I had half their faculties of enjoyment, and freshness of feeling."

"Extraordinary!" said Bagot. "As I said before, I'm not a woman; but, 'pon my life, what you can find to do here—what earthly excitement there is for you, is beyond my conception."

"Tiresome man!" thought Lady Lee, executing a difficult run on the keys; "how can I stop him?"—"Would you have us excite ourselves," said she, "with betting, and with brandy-and-water and cigars?"

"Oh, curse your sneers," thought Bagot, an additional flush stealing over his nose; then aloud, "Women have their excitements, I suppose, as well as men. They can try, at least, to be sociable, and so give more pleasure to themselves and their friends."

"They can," said Lady Lee, leaving the piano and coming up to him—"they can be sociable in congenial society, but the difficulty is to get it. People's

tastes differ so, and then some are so hard to please. You, I fancy, Colonel, are not fastidious. You should be more indulgent to those who are."

Again Bagot reddened, suspecting sarcasm, though Lady Lee did not intend just then to be sarcastic, but was only expressing her thoughts.

"I choose my society, as I've a right to do, according to my own pleasure," said Bagot; "and 'gad, madam, though it mayn't suit your high notions, I think it better than moping."

"I didn't mean to offend," said Lady Lee, laying her finger on Bagot's arm, but immediately removing it, afraid of a tobacco taint. "Fastidiousness, far from being a merit, or a thing to be proud of, is a positive curse. I would give the world to be able to take people for what they are worth, and to be blind to spots, which catch my eye sooner, unfortunately, than merits. Insight, believe me, may mislead one more than dulness."

Bagot didn't understand her in the least, for he was by no means of a metaphysical turn.

"I know some clever women," said the still unmollified Colonel, "as clever, perhaps, as any of my acquaintance—yes, any—but who don't think themselves above the rest of the world. They show their cleverness in surpassing their friends, not in shunning them."

Lady Lee looked quietly up at him.

"Excellent," said she, "a good thought well expressed. You improve, Colonel."

"Yes," said Bagot, exhilarated by this unaccustomed applause, "women who have head enough for prime-ministers, and yet have some life in 'em, madam. Why, the wife of a friend of mine carried an election last year by her canvassing. Never was such a popular woman; and I've seen her make points at whist that 'twould puzzle Talleyrand or Major A. to beat. That's what I call a clever woman, now," said Bagot, looking triumphantly at Lady Lee, as he finished this clinching illustration, and rather surprised that she didn't seem to appreciate it. "And besides the advantage to yourself," Bagot went on, "don't you think it might be as well for me to have some little civility shown to my friends?—for I've got friends here, though you mayn't have any. But you never think of that," he added bitterly.

"Now, my dear Colonel, I really must be pardoned for not knowing that we had any friends in common." ("Ah, another fling, madam!" thought Bagot). "But you are right, and I have been very wrong not to think of that. Are there any in particular with whom my mediation might be of service! I can hardly think so."

"How do you know?" returned Bagot; "why

should you hardly think so? My interests may be different from yours—you don't seem to have any, for that matter. The family interests, too, are all going to the deuce; and when the boy comes of age, he'll find himself, at this rate, a stranger, begad, in the land of his fathers." And Bagot paused for a moment, to let the pathos of this image take effect. "There's Dubbley, now, over at Monkstone (a good fellow as ever breathed, and one that I'm under obligations to); a little attention to him would be very acceptable to me, and useful too. But no! you'd see me at Jericho first! I know that—I know that!"

"Oh, heavens!" said Lady Lee, "you know the man's a hopeless noodle, positively silly. You wouldn't ask me, surely, to encourage his visits. Consider the tax it would be on any rational creature. Besides, the poor man always seems so confused and bashful whenever I meet him, that he would certainly rather be let alone."

"No, he wouldn't," said Bagot. "He mayn't be very bright, perhaps, but he's fond of ladies' society. Why, for all you know, he might take a fancy to Miss Payne or the other one; and he's rich enough to be a good match; you can't deny that." Lady Lee smiled at the thought of Mr Dubbley's chance of suc-

cess with either of them. "At any rate, as I said, I shall be obliged to you to be civil to him when he comes."

Lady Lee was anxious to atone to Bagot for the unintentional offence she had given him, and from which his manner showed him to be still smarting. So she at once promised to tolerate Mr Dubbley, and to be as agreeable to him as she possibly could, whenever he came to the Heronry.

CHAPTER VIII.

Meanwhile, the riding party had passed through the lodge gates out into the lane that ran in front of them. The Corporal rode between the two ladies, initiating them into the minor mysteries of the *manège*.

"Little finger dividing the reins, if you please, Miss Payne. Feel the filly's mouth gently. Sit a little more upright, Miss Young, but not stiffly; you lean forward rather too much; and pray don't touch the reins with your right hand."

"Dear me," said Rosa, "how very stupid of me; you told me that twice before. I'm afraid you find me very troublesome, Mr Corporal."

"Impossible!" said the gallant rough-rider; "I wish to heaven my other duties were half as much to my mind."

"I'm sorry you don't like them," said Rosa, "but I had always imagined—(you'll excuse me, Mr Cor-

poral, for I'm quite ignorant of military matters, and the idea was certainly ridiculous)—I had always imagined that corporals were taken from among the common soldiers."

"So they are," said Onslow.

"And do you mean to say," said Orelia, fixing her eyes on him with surprise, "that you were once a common soldier?"

"I feel honoured by your doubting it," said the Corporal, bowing, with a smile; "but I certainly was."

"Dear me," thought Orelia, "the officers in this regiment must be princes of the blood at the very least!"

"But the common soldiers in the cavalry are not all gentlemen, are they?" asked Rosa.

"Gentlemen!—no," said the Corporal, "nothing of the kind. Have the goodness to slacken your off rein a little—you are pulling your horse round."

For some little time they rode on in silence. How were they to treat this gentlemanly Corporal? Both glanced at him,—Rosa shyly, Orelia steadily. There was as little of the trooper in his face as in his manners. A handsome aquiline nose, short upper lip, round chin, wavy black hair, and somewhat dissipated look (as before mentioned), were the components of a very thoroughbred countenance. But whatever

embarrassment they might have experienced, he certainly felt none, but wore precisely the air of a gentleman in the company of his equals; and such Orelia did not in the least doubt him to be. Nay, not content with coming to that conclusion, she mentally decided that he was a much finer gentleman than any of her acquaintance; and how far she may have been influenced in this opinion by his good looks, his prowess, and the danger from which he had so gallantly rescued her, I leave my lady readers to determine.

Presently the strangeness of the situation wore off, and, forgetting his uniform and the stripes on his arm, they found it very agreeable to have a companion in their riding-master. They observed that he never volunteered a remark or opinion, avoiding all appearance of presuming on his position with them; but whenever he was appealed to on any subject, he replied with perfect ease, good breeding, and correctness of expression. And so they rode on, the two young ladies chatting unreservedly, and the dragoon occasionally joining in the conversation, till he began to forget his character of instructor, and, not troubling them with many hints or equestrian precepts, seemed to enjoy the ride as much as they.

Not far from the park gates, on their return homeward, they overtook a yellow caravan, travelling from

Doddington fair to some other scene of festivity. On nearing it, Rosa recognised in the driver, who walked beside it, the venerable merryandrew who had invited them up to his stage out of the tumult. It struck Rosa that she might at once requite his civility, and afford the highest pleasure to her friend Julius, by inviting the old gentleman to favour them with a private performance at the Heronry, and she resolved to accost him accordingly.

Mr Holmes (that was the merryandrew's name) appeared to entertain some delusive conceits respecting the appearance of his legs; for, not content with exhibiting them to the public in the tight-fitting hose already spoken of (which might have been justified on professional grounds), he wore in private life black velveteen breeches and worsted stockings, with laced half-boots. He had also a calf-skin waistcoat, with long flaps, worn rather bald in some parts, and fastened with a row of blue glass buttons; a green shooting-jacket, with brass buttons; and a hat, with the narrowest brim ever seen on human head, except that of the Duke of Wellington, as represented in the authentic portraits of Mr Punch. The venerable man walked beside his horse with all the alacrity that might be expected from so experienced a tumbler, while his family travelled inside the yellow caravan.

"Good morning to you," said Rosa, as they passed him. "Are you going far?"

Mr Holmes turned round, and seeing the young ladies, he stopped, brought his stockings together, till they formed but one perpendicular line, with the half-boots diverging in opposite directions at the bottom of it, and taking off his narrow-brimmed hat, he made a very flexible and elastic bow, without much apparent effort, though Orelia afterwards declared she heard his spine creak.

"Young ladies, your most obedient," said Mr Holmes, in a thin reedy voice, cracked partly with age, partly with continually playing Punch. "We are going, *Deo volente*, to Brixham, which is seven miles off."

"And are you in a great hurry?" asked Rosa.

"Now, what earthly business can that be of yours, you little gossip?" said the austere Orelia. "Can't you let the good man alone?"

"Why, he might come and perform to us, now he's so close," whispered Rosa, "and Juley would like it so much. Don't you think, Mr Showman, you could stop at this house you see between the trees here, and favour us with a performance? and we'll endeavour to repay your trouble."

"Time," said the gallant though aged comedian, "is only valuable to me for the purpose of obliging the ladies."

"And you are sure it won't put you out of your way?" asked Rosa.

"Not at all," said Mr Holmes; "I'm accustomed to perform to the aristocracy, and I always prefer a discriminating audience. I shall attend you with pleasure, ladies."

"There now, Reley," said Rosa, triumphantly; "you see I'm not always wrong. Please to follow us, Mr Showman."

"I expect to see you a columbine yet," said Orelia, as they rode on.

So it came to pass that Lady Lee, looking out of her window to see them arrive, beheld with surprise the yellow caravan with the green door, and Mr Holmes marching with a feeble stateliness of gait beside it, approaching her residence, and asked Mr Dubbley—who, encouraged by his conversation with Bagot, had taken an early opportunity of coming to call—what could be the meaning of it? The Squire, thus appealed to, left his seat in the background, and came to the window with such nervous haste, that her ladyship expected to see him go head foremost through the panes into a laurustinus bush on the lawn; but he was unable, though he rubbed his bald forehead till it shone again, to account for the phenomenon, otherwise than by considering it to be a piece of most particular impudence on the part of

the trampers, entitling them to pains and penalties, which he, as a magistrate, was ready, in his ardour to oblige Lady Lee, forthwith to inflict. But Rosa's entrance cut short these hostile designs, for, at her explanation, Lady Lee confided Mr Holmes and his family to the hospitality of the housekeeper, and decided that the performance should take place immediately after lunch, which was now waiting for the equestrians.

While the two girls were slipping off their riding-dresses, they had a debate, principally conducted by Rosa, on the subject of the puzzling, mysterious, gentlemanly Corporal. Rosa was of opinion that he could be nothing short of a disguised nobleman, though she did not settle his precise rank in the peerage. Orelia said little, but, like the silent parrot, perhaps she thought the more.

Mr Dubbley was attired in his choicest raiment for the visit, and smiled incessantly, frequently beginning sentences, and then leaving off in the middle, thus destroying any small chance his hearers might otherwise have had of divining his meaning, and hurriedly rubbing the bald part of his head, as if he were very hot, which indeed he seemed to be. But after a glass or two of wine he became more confident and coherent.

"Fine day for riding," said he to Orelia; "uncom-

mon fine—never saw a finer. Southerly wind and a cloudy sky. They say, you know, that when the wind is in the south, it blows the bait into the fish's mouth."

"And, therefore, 'tis a favourable day for riding, eh, Dubbley?" quoth Bagot, smiling on the ladies. "My friend Dubbley's allusions are, perhaps, a little obscure sometimes."

The Squire, though he didn't understand Bagot's speech, perceived the intention to make fun of him, and rubbed his forehead with a yellow silk pocket-handkerchief, till, between friction and the moisture produced by nervous agitation, it attained a very high degree of polish.

"How can people say Mr Dubbley's not bright?" whispered Orelia to Lady Lee. "I can see my own reflection in his forehead as plainly as in that dish-cover before him."

"Are you going on with your improvements at Monkstone, Mr Dubbley?" asked Lady Lee.

Mr Dubbley, at the moment the question was put, happened to be drinking some bottled ale, and, in his hurry to make reply, the fluid went the wrong way, and ran out again, partially through his nose.

"Going on capital well, my lady," answered the Squire, as soon as he had done choking. "There's one thing I think you'd like most particular—a

summer-house on the plan of a Grecian pagoda, with a turpentine walk leading up to it, that takes you all round by the cabbage-beds, and along by the back of the stables."

"Are all your improvements confined to the exterior of Monkstone?" asked Lady Lee.

"By no means," answered the Squire; "some of them are going on in the shrubbery. Your ladyship's no conception what money I've spent on plants and bushes lately. I got a good many hints from Dixon, Sir Christopher's head-gardener. There's no better agriculturist than Dixon; and if ever he leaves Sir Christopher, I'll get him to come to me. I'm no great hand myself at fancy gardening, though I'll grow marrowfat pease and early cabbages against any man for a ten-pound note."

"We're going to have a little conjuring presently, Mr Dubbley," said Rosa. "Are you fond of that kind of amusement?"

"Mr Dubbley can't do any juggling, I know," said Julius, who was perched on a chair by his friend Rosa, with his eyebrows on a level with his plate.

"How do you know that?" asked the Squire, smiling on him.

"Because I heard Uncle Bag say yesterday that you were no conjuror," said Julius.

"Silence, you villain!" said Bagot, shaking his

fist at him. "Little boys should be seen, and not heard." But Mr Dubbley took the insinuation quite literally.

"Very true," said he, "I've no turn for that sort of thing; I'm all plain and above-board. But I don't mind seeing jugglers, though some of their tricks do make one think that they've sold themselves to the—to the old gentleman," said the Squire, adopting the most elegant periphrasis he could think of for the unmentionable word he had blundered on.

"Come," said Rosa, "as we've all finished, we'll go to see the performance."

Accordingly, they adjourned to another room, having a curtain drawn across one end, which being lifted, revealed the venerable conjuror attired in the same magical costume he was accustomed to appear in at fairs. Before him stood a box covered with a cloth, and, the audience being seated, Mr Holmes proceeded to execute sundry feats of legerdemain. But first he made a speech, cautioning them by no means to allow their attention to be withdrawn by any conversation he might address to them while executing his sleight-of-hand, as his remarks would be all made with a view of more easily deceiving their eyes, while their minds were thus distracted by his eloquence. This charming candour had a great effect on the audience, impressing them with a profound

idea of the magician's perfect good faith, and disposing them to be alert for the detection of his tricks, while they were more than ever convinced that their alertness must be baffled.

There was nothing particularly new, or especially marvellous, in the performance, the feats being the same that Mr Holmes had been in the habit of exhibiting for the last half-century; nevertheless, seldom had he performed to a more attentive or interested audience. The only people inclined to make any disturbance were Julius, who, seated in Rosa's lap, broke out into shouts of delight, and struggled to rush behind the curtain after each feat that took his fancy; and Miss Fillett, who, being nervous and somewhat superstitious, occasionally shrieked, as she stood behind among the other servants, and then giggled hysterically.

Among other feats, he borrowed a shilling from Mr Dubbley, and also his hat, which the Squire surrendered not without misgivings; and, putting the shilling under the hat, requested that gentleman to remove the hat, when a guinea-pig appeared, to his great surprise and pleasure. Then the conjuror pretended not to know what had become of the shilling, till, perceiving that Mr Dubbley was getting uneasy at the non-appearance of the coin, he directed him to look in the heel of his shoe, where it was found.

"'Pon my life," said Mr Dubbley, "'tis quite incredulous! I couldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it."

Afterwards he drew a circle on the floor with a bit of chalk, and requested Mr Dubbley—whom he appeared to consider a suitable neophyte—to place himself within it. But the Squire stood secretly in great awe of witchcraft, and had once seen Der Freyschutz at the London opera; consequently, he hung back, dimly expecting that, in the event of his compliance, the room might suddenly be darkened, and himself surrounded by evil genii, summoning him to surrender his soul to the enemy of mankind.

"No, hang it, no!" said the Squire, wiping his forehead, and affecting to laugh knowingly, as the magician solemnly beckoned to him; "no, no, none of those tricks—one never knows what those fellows may be at." But looking round, and seeing a half smile on Lady Lee's face, while Julius at the same time nearly struggled himself out of Rosa's arms, in his eagerness to be subjected to the magical influence, the Squire, saying "Eh! well, never mind; but are you sure 'tis all right?—no humbug, you know," advanced lingeringly, and took up the position assigned him, with one foot at a time, amidst a suppressed chuckle from the servants; while Orelia, with her under lip a little protruded, and her mouth

and nostril curved, looked at him with superb scorn. The only person who seemed to sympathise with him was Miss Fillett, who uttered two little shrieks as he entered the magic ring. Then the necromancer desired him to drink some wine-and-water from a charmed goblet, which he at first declined to do, till Mr Holmes himself sipped a little of it, assuring him 'twas veritable wine-and-water, such as he had drunk at lunch, when he was persuaded to take it; and muttering, "No tricks! damme, I'm a justice of the peace," swallowed the contents. Then Mr Holmes took a bit of wood like a ruler, which he handed round for inspection. "No deception, ladies," said he; and, applying it to various parts of the Squire's person, proceeded to draw from his ear, his elbow, and the bald part of his head, as if he had been a barrel, the wine-and-water they had just seen him drink, receiving it in the goblet, and subsequently offering it to any person inclined to be sceptical. He was proceeding with some more tricks when Mr Dubbley darted out of the circle, feeling his ear, and looking at the elbow of his coat, while exclaiming—"No, hang it, 'tis somebody else's turn now—one of you try!"

After some more feats, Mr Holmes set up Punch's theatre, and performed the drama of that personage's life, with some variations invented by himself. The

dog Toby, a small grizzled cur with a white face, misbehaved on this occasion, attacking Pick, Julius's cat, who had followed his master into the room; but the valiant Pick, accustomed to lord it supreme over all the dogs of the household, received him with such a scientific one, two, on the nose and eyes, that the dog Toby retreated howling, but presently returned to the charge, notwithstanding the formidable appearance of his antagonist, who suddenly swelled, tail and all, to double his ordinary size; whereupon Julius, slipping out of Rosa's arms, rushed to the rescue, and administered a kick that caused Toby to relinquish his hostile intent of reprisal.

The last part of the performance was the introduction of Mr Holmes's little grandchild, about Julius's age, who was brought in by his mother, a slatternly resigned-looking woman. The child, who was of a pale and serious aspect, was dressed in short drawers, pink hose, rosettes in his shoes, and a spangled doublet and girdle. He commenced by letting his legs slide out under him till they formed but one horizontal line, touching the floor; next, resting on his heels and hands, he bent backwards, and picked up pins with his eyelids; shouldered one leg like a musket, and, turning both over his back, hopped on his hands like a frog — all with much sadness and solemnity. Julius was enchanted,

and whispered to Rosa that he should like to be able to do that, and to wear a spangled coat; but Rosa said she thought he had better stick to his own line, which was the legitimate drama; for Julius could repeat, "My name is Norval," "To be or not to be," and "Is it a dagger?" with good emphasis and discretion, and with appropriate gestures,—accomplishments which Rosa seized the opportunity to cause him at once to exhibit, while Mr Holmes looked on with a patronising air. Then Lady Lee, calling Julius to her, desired him to fetch some of his playthings, which, together with a large plum-cake, he was to bestow on the little boy—the poor little boy who had nobody to give him playthings; and Julius forthwith endowed his young friend with the same, who received them without a smile, and handed them to his mother, who placed them under her shawl, and told him to thank the little gentleman.

"I suppose that's your daughter?" said Lady Lee to Mr Holmes.

"My daughter-in-law," said Mr Holmes, bowing.

"Does she perform in any way?" inquired Lady Lee.

Mr Holmes shrugged his shoulders with a somewhat contemptuous grimace. "No talent," said he;

"we tried her as a columbine at one time; but the dress — 'tisn't every one that can dress in tights" (looking down with great pride on his own drumsticks), and then added in a whisper, laying his finger on his nose, "Thick, beefy, clumsy!"

"And the poor little boy?" said Lady Lee; "he looks sickly. Isn't he well?"

"Not strong enough for the profession, I'm afraid," said Mr Holmes; "talent, but no stamina." The pale mother sighed, and pressed the boy's hand. Rosa noticed the action.

"Why do you allow him to do these tricks if he is not able?" said Rosa to the mother; "it seems quite cruel." But the woman gave her to understand it was quite against her wishes and prayers that the despotic Mr Holmes persisted in training the boy, notwithstanding a child of hers had previously died under the discipline.

"Dear, how dreadful! — and such an old man too! How old are you?" asked Rosa aloud of Mr Holmes. The woman hastily whispered to her that he didn't like to be reminded of his age; and Mr Holmes affecting not to hear the question, the subject dropped.

Mr Holmes, having now been rewarded so liberally as to call forth his very finest bow, and thanks in a set speech, prepared to depart. But first he

was taken aside by the Squire, who had conceived the idea that some insight into the art of conjuring might raise him greatly in the estimation of society in general, and particularly in that of Lady Lee.

"Is it pretty easy, now?" said the Squire, taking Mr Holmes confidentially by the lapel of his coat —"is it pretty easy, now, to learn those tricks of yours?"

"That," returned Mr Holmes, "depends very much on the natural capacity of the pupil."

"Oh!" said the Squire, who was somewhat doubtful of his own talents for acquiring anything not of a sporting nature; "and did you ever teach anybody?"

"Did I ever teach anybody?" repeated Mr Holmes, gravely. "You are not then aware, sir, that legerdemain is an extremely fashionable pursuit?"

"Never heard of it before," said the Squire, baffled by the long word. "I'm talking of those tricks you've been showing us."

"That is legerdemain," said Mr Holmes, loftily. "I have had the honour, sir, of instructing some of the first noblemen in the land in the art."

"God bless me!" cried the Squire; "who would have thought it? And are your terms pretty reasonable?"

Mr Holmes rubbed his chin thoughtfully, and his nose also, for he could not easily rub one without the other. "Lord Thoroughpin" (a nobleman well known in sporting and fashionable circles) "was my last pupil, and he paid me two guineas a lesson?" said he.

"And did he learn it all in one lesson?" asked the Squire.

"In three lessons, and with a good deal of private practice, he mastered one trick," answered the showman.

"Six guineas for one trick!" cried the Squire; "but you'd do it cheaper in the country, wouldn't you? Hang it, no. I'll give up the idea," he thought—"too expensive."

Bagot stept out, when the performance was over, to have a little talk with Miss Fillett, whose co-operation he was anxious to secure in his design upon Mr Dubbley.

"Come here, Kitty," quoth Bagot, beckoning her into the breakfast-room; "you can be a sharp girl, if you like—deuced sharp. Now, if you'll just follow my advice, and say nothing about it to any of your gossips (the tongue, by Jove, is a devilish deal the worst part about you women)—if you'll be mum, and do as you're told, I'll make it worth your while. This shall be the first instalment, Kitty," displaying a five-pound note.

Kitty stood before him primly, with her hands in the pockets of her apron.

"I wish to ask one question, if you please, Colonel Lee," said Miss Fillett. "Is it anything that's not proper for a respectable young female to do?"

"Bother!" said Bagot; "you know Mr Dubbley of Monkstone, who's up-stairs now?"

"I should think I did," said Miss Fillett, "and a saucy gentleman he is. I shall tell him a piece of my mind, the next time he winks his eye upon me."

"No, don't mind him," said the Colonel, grinning; "he don't mean any harm: he comes here to make love to your mistress."

"Ho, ho!" said Kitty, scornfully tossing up her head; "what'll he take for his chance, I wonder? Dubbley, indeed! Ho, ho!—the idea's perpisterous, Colonel."

"Of course it is," returned the Colonel; "but I don't want him to know that. For certain reasons of my own, which don't matter to you—perhaps I've got a bet about it, perhaps I haven't—but, for reasons of my own, I want him to think he's got a chance; and he'll never think so if you don't put it in his head. You can do that if you like."

Kitty nodded. "I could persuade him anythink," said she; "why, he ain't got the wit of a child in some things."

"Of course you could," said Bagot. "Well, just you put it in his head, every now and then, that his courtship is going on swimmingly."

"Hexcellent!" exclaimed Miss Fillett; "I'll engage to puff up his conceit so, that he'll make a hoffer in a week, if necessary."

"Ah, but it's not necessary," said Bagot; "don't you see, he'd get such a reply as would prevent him from trying his luck here any more, and there would be an end of the business. No; you must tell him to wait for your instructions, Kitty, as to the proper time for doing that. Play with him, Kitty. Tell him of remarks her ladyship has passed upon him, and make them warm or cold, as required; and the deuce is in it if you don't make something handsome out of him, besides what I shall give you; to say nothing of the fun of the thing. You love a little bit of mischief, Kitty, eh?"

Miss Fillett did not disown the soft impeachment, but rather confirmed it by at once entering into Bagot's views, and accepting the bank-note as a retaining-fee, promising herself diversion as well as profit in the business.

Mr Holmes having resumed the costume of ordinary life, and packed his stage-property into his caravan, together with his relations, now left the grounds, to disappear for some time both from the neighbourhood and from our story.

CHAPTER IX.

Bagot having, as he considered, done penance the greater part of the day in ladies' society, resolved to indemnify himself by a snug dinner in his own quarters.

These were situated at the back of one of the wings of the house, and were fitted up in conformity with the taste of the inhabitant. The furniture was comfortable, and adapted for lounging; no infernal humbug about it, Bagot said. You might throw your leg over the arm of the chair, when you chose to adopt that position, without fear of a crash; and the legs of the table were not likely to give way if any one sat on it, or even if a convivial gentleman performed a war-dance thereon after dinner, as had happened once or twice during Bagot's occupancy. Some wine-glasses and tumblers stood on a shelf against the wall, together with a case of bottles, so that there was no necessity to summon a servant

whenever he wanted a dram, which was fortunate for the servant. There were some pictures on the wall, recording various racing events, on one of which Bagot had made what he called a "pot of money." Whips and spurs were plentifully scattered about, with here and there a stray running-rein, bit, or martingale. For literature, there were a sporting newspaper and a scurrilous one, and two or three volumes, one of which contained the memoirs of an illustrious woman, who has confided her love affairs to the public, and who, though never included in the list of popular authoresses, may justly be considered as belonging to the number. Bagot had known this Messalina in his youth, and used to hint that he considered himself deuced lucky in not having his name stuck in the memoirs; though it is difficult to see how that could have affected his character.

To this retreat Bagot had directed a snug dinner to be conveyed—mullagatawny soup, grilled turkey, and a saddle of mutton—intending to get through the evening as well as he could in his own society, which was to him, of an evening, a dreadful affliction. He used to say that, though Bagot Lee was a deuced good fellow, he didn't know a more infernal bore to be alone with after dinner. On opening the door he was, therefore, pleased as well as surprised to see a figure seated in an easy attitude before the fire.

This unexpected visitor was a thin, wiry, rather tall man; he had hollow cheeks, an aquiline nose, and a bronze complexion. His eye was greenish in colour, small, and open, so that you saw the full circle—and was unsoftened by eyelashes, for he had none. The thin lips, being habitually drawn back, had created in his cheeks two rigid lines, reaching from his nostrils to below his mouth, and more strongly chiselled than his age, which was about thirty, warranted. He had a thin crop of hair, and a prominent skull-like forehead. The expression was one of indomitable assurance, self-confidence, and recklessness, giving one the idea that he was excellently well-pleased with himself, without having any great reason to be so.

Mr Seager—that was his name—was a fast man; so fast, that he had long ago outrun the constable, that functionary having for many years toiled after him in vain. He betted a good deal, and generally won; but his winnings, like the winnings of most knowing men, never seemed to enrich him. He lived altogether in public—at clubs, billiard-tables, and race-meetings—and thus possessed an enormous circle of acquaintance, at least two-thirds of whom were rather shy of him. But this state of social difficulty, where he had, as it were, to hold on to the edge of society with both hands to keep himself in

position, gave him far more pleasure, by employing his prevailing qualities of impudence and vigilance, than he could possibly have found in a life of ease and popularity.

However, there were some who considered him not a bad fellow in general, and, moreover, to be respected for his knowing qualities. "Cool hand, that fellow!" "Devilish hard to get over him,"—such was the style of encomium passed on him by his panegyrists, of whom Bagot was one, though without any great reason; for if, among the numerous mischievous spirits that accompanied poor Bagot in his career through life, any one was especially entitled to be called his evil genius, that one was Mr Seager.

Bagot looked up to Seager for the same reason that Dubbley looked up to Bagot—on account of his superior sagacity in sporting matters. Not but that Bagot's intellect was just as acute as Seager's, but he had drawbacks which Seager had not. For instance, Bagot was fond of the society he frequented, for its own sake. He was rather popular in it, and would have been sorry to risk his popularity by any act likely to lower him in the estimation of the world he lived in. In fact, though he had no very strong sense of honour, he had the fear of public opinion, which is perhaps, with the majority, its not ineffi-

cient substitute. Seager was careless of the good opinion of his associates, and only required their toleration, thus widening considerably his field of action; for there are numerous acts on which the world, whether the sporting, the fashionable, or any other world belonging to our social system, may see fit to express a negative disapprobation, without passing positive sentence on the offender. Bagot would sometimes lend money to a needy acquaintance who applied to him, not so much because he was really good-natured, as because he wished to possess the reputation of being so. Nobody ever detected Seager in the commission of any such error. In fact, Bagot, in all his transactions and habits, was under an influence that Seager, going among his fellow-men antagonistically, as a spy enters an enemy's camp, did not acknowledge; and so it was that the latter, strong in his concentrated selfishness, seldom met with his match in his own peculiar walk.

"Hillo! where did you come from, old chap? What the deuce brought you here?" was Bagot's greeting.

"I thought I should astonish your weak mind," said Mr Seager, holding out his left hand, without rising. "'Tis rather a good joke, my coming to a place like this. Sit down and I'll tell you all about it.

Don't give yourself any trouble. I told them to lay the table for two."

"Well, never mind telling me what brought you here now," said Bagot; "keep it till after dinner. I hate any bother just before dinner; here you are, and that's enough. Gad, Seager, I thought I was in for a solitary evening."

Mr Seager laughed a little hard, grim laugh, and after a pause repeated it.

"Excuse me, Lee, but I was thinking what you would do if you ever had the misfortune to be clapt into jail at any time—(and not so very unlikely, you know.) Four bare walls, a bed, and your own society. Damme, Lee, you'd go stark staring mad in a fortnight's solitary. I'll take you seven to four you'd be a lunatic in thirteen days."

"Stop that!" said Bagot, from the inner room, where he had gone to wash his hands; "I shall be obliged to you to find something pleasant to talk about;" and he growled out something not very flattering to Mr Seager's tact in his choice of topics in general, but which was lost in the noise he made in the washing-basin. "What sort of a book have you made for the next event?"

"Capital!" said Seager, with another little hard laugh. "I may win seven thousand, and I can't lose more than a pony, let things go as bad as they like.

Good men, too;—Broughton gave me fifty to one in twenties against Titbury when he was an outsider."

"Lucky beggar!" said Bagot, arranging his coat and sitting down, as the dinner was placed on the table. "If I could afford it, I'd give you a thousand a-year to make my book for me—and I don't consider myself a bad hand, either. And how about the match with my lord?"

"Beat him, of course," said Seager; "'twas the best of eleven games, you know. Now, I think, out of the eleven I could have won nine if I chose, but I let him run away with five, and only won the match by a run of thirteen off the balls; consequence is, he's all anxiety for another trial."

"In which, of course, you won't gratify him on any account," said Bagot, chuckling.

"I'm affecting shy at present," said Seager. "Told him 'twas all luck, and he could give me points. I really shouldn't wonder if I got odds from him in the end. His conceit of his own play is ridiculous, you know."

"If you don't take that out of him, he's incurable," said Bagot. "Did you make a pretty good thing of it?"

"Pretty well," returned Seager. "He paid up like a trump, and not before 'twas wanted, I can tell

you, for I was precious hard up. By the by, Lee, I'm afraid I must dun you for that hundred and fifty."

"Can't you be quiet till after dinner?" growled Bagot, laying down his knife and fork, highly disgusted. "I vow to gad 'tis enough to convert one's victuals into poison, to be reminded of such infernal matters just when one is beginning to feel a little comfortable."

"Quite right, old fellow—I apologise. We will, as you say, postpone the subject, especially as that wasn't the only cause of my coming. You must know I was considering the other night, at the club, what part of the country I should favour with my presence for a few weeks; for, owing to certain reasons, town was getting too hot for me; and, happening to take up the paper, I stumbled on a paragraph stating that the —th dragoons were coming to Doddington. Now, I knew the regiment some years back, when they used to shake their elbows a little," (imitating the motion of rattling a dice-box), "and it struck me I might live at free quarters with you, and perhaps do a little business with the bones" (*Anglice*, dice) "at the same time. So here I am for a day or two, at any rate—and, to-morrow we'll knock up those fellows' quarters."

"A deuced good move," said Bagot, "and one I was intending to make myself. I dine with them

to-morrow, and so shall you. Take some sherry, my boy!"

When dinner was removed, both drew their chairs up to the fire, and helped themselves to a few glasses of wine, by way of formality, before setting into serious drinking. Both lit their cigars; but first Bagot rose, and, unlocking a drawer, came back with a bundle of notes, some of which he selected, and handed them across to his companion, saying—"There's your money; now let's have no more cursed dunning."

Mr Seager was pleasantly surprised, for he had not expected such prompt and satisfactory payment. His inquiries drew from Bagot (who was rather proud of his own shrewdness, and anxious for the approbation of so good a judge as Seager) an account of the mode in which he had obtained the supply.

Seager sat for a little while silent, smoking vigorously. Bagot had presented him with a congenial subject for thought. Presently he asked—"Is this the only time you've tried the dodge?"

"Why, 'tis the only chance I've had," answered Bagot. "One doesn't meet with rich greenhorns like Dubbley every day."

"You must trot her ladyship out a little," quoth Seager. "By Jove, old fellow, with such cards in your hand, you ought to make a good thing of it;

but you'll want a friend to help you. A man like Dubbley may be managed single-handed, but two will be better another time. I'm your man. In the first place there must be a little puffing—rich widow, great beauty, and all that sort of thing, in the George Robins style—which you couldn't do yourself with decency. As I said, I'm your man, and you must do as much for me another time. When I want a man to pull the strings and set the machinery going, I shall look to you."

Bagot made no direct reply, not caring to entertain the subject, which (though Seager's suggestions harmonised exactly with his own ideas on it) wore, certainly, rather a dirty aspect, when deliberately discussed. However, he thought there was, after all, no greater harm in borrowing money on these grounds than on any other; for Bagot, like all men living beyond their means, who are not downright swindlers, in all his borrowings and extravagance had some dim hazy notion of a grand settling-day, when everything was to be made square, though he never succeeded in realising very distinctly the mode in which it was to be done.

"What sort of a woman is this Lady Lee?" asked Seager, presently.

"Why, between you and me, as friends," returned Bagot, "I may say that I dislike her confoundedly—

I always did. I think I should have disliked most women in her place, but I've special objections to her."

"Why should you dislike any woman in her place?" asked Seager.

"Why," almost shouted Bagot—"why? Because when my poor nephew, Joe, married, he cut me out of the chance of the estate. If he hadn't married, he couldn't have had an heir."

"Decidedly not," said Seager, with a grin. "So there's a boy, is there? Good constitution, eh?"

"Strong as a lion," said Bagot; "and I'm glad of it. He's a good little chap, and I don't wish him any harm; but you must admit 'twas enough to try a fellow's temper to find one's-self cut out for the sake of a mewling soft-faced thing in petticoats. 'Twas done while I was in France, or I should have tried to stop it. However, Joe was so much younger than me, that I never expected to outlive him. 'Tis since the poor fellow's death that I've been most vexed by the thought of what I've been done out of."

"Gad!" said Seager, "after that, you needn't trouble yourself to state your special objections to her. If she was the finest woman that ever stept, I consider it your duty to hate her like the devil."

"Besides," said Bagot, "she's as proud as Lucifer, and deuced sarcastic. You've no idea what I have got to put up with from her. If I wasn't a good-tempered fellow, I should tell her my mind pretty plainly. As it is, I can hardly help flaring up sometimes."

"Don't do anything of the sort," said Seager; "you can do much better by keeping on good terms with her. If I were in your place, now, every time she offended me I'd put it in my pocket, and console myself with the thought of paying her off in a more profitable fashion than quarrelling. However, I'm glad to find that you'll be quite justified in considering your own interest only in connection with her. Damme, Lee, if I think she's entitled to the smallest consideration."

Bagot shook his head revengefully, and breathed hard. Between Seager's speeches and his own potations, he saw his wrongs through a more inflammatory medium than usual. His wrath seemed to make him thirsty, too, for his tumbler now began to be refilled with great frequency. Presently Seager proposed a hand at *écarté*—and they accordingly commenced playing.

Bagot, when his head was quite clear—which it seldom was at this hour of the evening—played very well; but he was never a match for Seager,

all whose soul, or instincts rather, were absorbed in the game. There was something feline in the expression of his hard unwinking eye, so round and bare of eyelashes, as it darted from his own cards to those which his adversary played out on the table; while his mouth was retracted, and fixed in a grim half-smile. Winning or losing, his face wore the same watchful look—whereas Bagot's frown would deepen to a scowl over a bad hand; and, when fortune favoured him, he would rap down a succession of winning cards with somewhat boisterous exultation.

At length Bagot's potations, which were not in the least interrupted by the game, rendered the cards somewhat misty and obscure to his sight. After having twice discarded his best trumps, and forgotten to mark the king, he threw down his hand, and pushed his chair away from the table.

"Come, one game more!" said Seager.

"No, sir!" said Bagot sternly; "no, sir! I've had enough of it, sir!"

Seager perceived that Bagot had reached the turning-point in his drink, and was passing into the ferocious and quarrelsome stage, as he was always pretty sure to do after losing.

"Well, leave it alone, then!" said Seager.

"I shall leave it alone, sir, or I shall not leave it alone," said Bagot thickly, and with increased

sternness and dignity. "I shall do exactly what I see fit, sir. Understand that I shall exercise my own discretion on that point, sir! and on every other, sir—every other, sir!"

"Well, don't be savage, old fellow," said Seager.

"I shall be savage, sir, or I shall not be savage, as I shall consider best!" returned the uncompromising Bagot, letting his voice slip into falsetto at every other syllable. "You've won your money, sir, and that's enough for you! Never mind, sir!"

"You're a pleasant old boy," said Seager, settling himself comfortably in his arm-chair. "I think I'll smoke a cigar."

Bagot mixed another tumbler of grog, breathing hard all the time. Seager was accustomed to his little irregularities of temper about this hour of the night, and didn't take much notice of him. Presently Bagot commenced again.

"Old boy!" repeated Bagot, slowly, and with utterance not the most fluent; "will you have the goodness, sir, to inform me who you called old boy? Might I request information on that point, sir?" The dignity with which this question was put was not to be surpassed.

"Never mind, old fellow," said Seager, puffing away at his cigar, "you shall be as young as you like."

"No, sir," said Bagot, rapping slowly on the table with his knuckles, and glaring at the stopper of the decanter before him as if it were the offending party. "No, sir—excuse me—I shall not be as young as I like; I shall be no younger than I am, sir, at your bidding, nor at any other person's—not an hour, sir! —not an hour, sir!" repeated Bagot, in every sentence remaining longer in the treble before descending to the bass, and slowly bringing his gaze round till it rested grimly on his guest. "Your conversation, sir, is unpleasant, and your manner is quarrelsome. I regret, sir, to be compelled to leave you;" and poor Bagot rose with difficulty, and made unsteadily towards the door of his bedroom. Having with some difficulty opened it, he paused a moment on the threshold, and, glaring on Seager, said—"You shall hear from me, sir, through a friend, in the morning"—after which he disappeared, and was presently heard snoring heavily.

"Shocking old fool when he's screwed," said Seager, throwing his cigar into the fire, and going off to his bedroom, where he slept comfortably and quietly; while poor Bagot, the victim of a troop of nightmares, puffed and gasped the livelong night, through his hot, parched, open mouth, in a slumber that looked not very unlike strangulation.

The next morning Bagot submitted rather sulkily

to Mr Seager's not very refined badinage on the subject of his intemperance on the previous night. They went over the stables together—afterwards rode out; and, on returning, played billiards, and drank cold brandy-and-water till it was time to dress and proceed to Doddington, to dine with the dragoons—whither they went in a dog-cart, and enjoyed themselves as will appear in the next chapter.

CHAPTER X.

No dragoons had been seen in Doddington within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, unless the reminiscences of that ancient and shadowy personage could extend back to Monmouth's rebellion, when Feversham's horse had marched through. And when it is remembered what a conspicuous feature her Majesty's troops, especially the mounted and mustached portion, form in societies long habituated to their presence, it may be supposed that the sensation they created in this secluded spot was immense, and only to be paralleled by the commotion which those ancient cavalry the Centaurs caused at Pirithous' wedding.

They had been detached to Doddington from the nearest garrison town, in consequence of disturbances in the surrounding district. All the place was agog to see them march in. It happened to be a very rainy day, and instead of a splendid, dazzling spec-

tacle, they presented to the sight a long row of bedraggled figures in red cloaks, which half-covered their splashed horses, and which quite concealed the glories of their uniform, trotting in none of the best order along the slippery and puddled street. But two days afterwards, the weather being propitious, they shone forth unclouded on the gaze of the inhabitants, and produced a great revolution in Doddington. The town was never very important in a commercial point of view, but now you would absolutely have supposed that the only remunerative pursuit that people of any trade or profession whatsoever could engage in was looking after the dragoons. Servant-maids were discharged at a moment's warning, only to be replaced by others just as love-stricken and inattentive. The millinery business, so far as making anything except love went, was at a stand-still; and the members of it went down in public estimation towards zero, exactly in the same proportion as they rose in favour with the officers. Slander was busy with the names of the prettiest, and even an ordinary countenance was no protection. Miss Bonady, who had superintended the education of young ladies in the art of bonnet-making for full twenty years, found her time-honoured good name in a fair way to be blasted; for a jury of matrons had been impanelled, and was now sitting on her char-

acter. Country lovers, who, up to the advent of the soldiery, had been progressing charmingly with their Dulcineas, suddenly turned green or yellow in colour, and savage in disposition, and took to poaching, or enlisted for soldiers; and, between agitation and tight-lacing, a vast number of children came prematurely into the world, many of whom, of both sexes, were reported to have been born with mustaches.

The beer trade began to thrive wonderfully in Doddington. It was not merely that the soldiers consumed a good deal themselves, but the inns where they were billeted were filled every night with those convivial operatives who came to enjoy military company and conversation; while their wives either stood resignedly, like mournful caryatides, outside the doors, waiting for their lords and masters, or else disturbed the harmony of the meetings, by entering and forcibly carrying off their truant spouses from the society that so enthralled them. Dissenting ministers grew more energetic in their denunciation of all pomps and vanities, especially such as appertain to men of the sword, as their flock diminished in number,—for many of their young female disciples had of late ceased altogether to wrestle with the spirit; and many an anxious old lady might be seen, after dusk, inquiring if anybody had seen her Jenny, the said Jenny being at that time probably loitering

in some shady lane, having round her waist an arm in a scarlet sleeve.

The officers had established their mess in a large room of The Bush, the principal hotel of Doddington. Here, at seven o'clock in the evening, the various individual streams of ennui, imprecation, and desire for excitement, that had meandered wearily through the solitary and uncongenial region during the day, were received into one pond, thus fulfilling the great object of that important military institution, the mess, where warriors, who have been all day trying unsuccessfully to kill time in single combat—attempting to ride him down—poking at him with billiard cues, and the like feeble efforts at discomfiting him—are enabled to join forces, and fall upon their enemy in a body.

First at the dinner-hour came Tindal the Major, who lived in the inn. Smart, tight-built, and standing on the hearth-rug with his legs apart, as if there were a horse between them, one could almost swear, even when seeing him on foot, that he was a good rider—an accomplishment by no means so common as might be presumed in the British cavalry. Tindal was a man who liked to live in a large garrison-town, with crack regiments in it, among whom might be got up steeple-chases, wherein he might distinguish himself, with a pack or two of foxhounds within

reach, a well-appointed mess, and a rubber of whist afterwards, with dollar points, and a fellow sitting by to bet about the odd trick. These tastes, it was pretty clear, would not be gratified in Doddington, and the Major accordingly cursed, in a calm, deliberate sort of way, the hour in which he was sent there.

Enter to him Cornet Suckling, who has not been long in the service, and whose upper lip looks like a fragment of the body of a young gosling. The Cornet, having heard much of the Major's steeple-chasing exploits, and being (though a weak-minded youth) addicted to hero-worship, has in secret a great veneration for him, and, while speaking of him in his absence as "Tindal," or "old Tindal," or "that fellow Tindal," shows considerable uneasiness as he approaches the hearth-rug, whereon the formidable Major is planted, and throws himself into wonderful and unnatural attitudes, in his attempts to appear at ease. First, he seats himself on the top rail of the back of a chair, and, tilting it over on two legs, rocks himself to and fro, in a manner nervous to behold; then he pauses, and punches the pattern of the carpet with his spur; then stooping his long awkward form, till his elbow rests on the mantelpiece, he puts his splay foot on the fender, thereby upsetting it, and bringing all the fire-irons clattering down upon Tindal's heels, who, as he shifts his position, damns

him internally for a stupid young muff. Tindal doesn't like him, and seldom says much to him, except on parade, where he "pitches into" the unfortunate Cornet (who has a fretting charger, and doesn't know how to ride him) in a way that would render him desperate, if he had spirit enough to become so.

Presently hilarious voices are heard laughing their way up-stairs, and after a short delay, occasioned by their meeting with a chambermaid on the landing-place, Lieutenants Wylde Oates and Harry Bruce make their appearance. Without much in common, except an immense flow of spirits, these two are generally together. Both of them are sharp lads, and though their method of enjoying life is somewhat riotous, yet they do enjoy it, and will be capital fellows by and by, when the effervescence has subsided, and the liquor has got mellow. In the mean time, they are worth a gross, either of languid, irreproachable endurers of existence, or of fast men with low tastes, for they are a pair of gentlemanly scamps. Oates has a florid face, half hidden in shirt collar, in which he affects to imitate his deceased parent, who was a noted sporting character, and broke his neck in riding over a dining-table after dinner for a wager, leaving to Oates, junior, a sorely diminished patrimony and a sporting reputation — two things scarcely suscep-

tible of simultaneous improvement. Bruce is handsome and dark, with brown curly hair and brown eyes, and a face expressive of good-humour and intelligence. They immediately communicate the adventures of the day to Tindal, who listens with grim approval; while Suckling, brightening up, hovers round the outskirts of the conversation, and occasionally fills up an interval with an interjection or an admiring laugh.

"There's a queer old boy coming to dine with me, Major," said Bruce. "I picked him up to-day as I was poking about an old tower in the neighbourhood of the town. He had found a large fragment of stone, with an illegible inscription on it, and being a great antiquary, was staggering home under his prize, when I offered to carry it for him. In return, he afforded me such a quantity of curious information about the antiquities of the place, that we became quite friendly on the spot."

As he spoke, Mr Titcherly was announced, and a little old gentleman entered, in an antique suit of black, with shoe-buckles and a brown wig. Mr Titcherly was the literary lion of Doddington; he was, as Bruce said, of the Dryasdust fraternity, and had devoted his long life to collecting information regarding the antiquities of the town, diving into ancient chronicles, deciphering the inscriptions on

old tombstones, and occasionally filling up gaps very ingeniously with theories of his own. In this way he had compiled a complete chronicle of Doddington, from the earliest times down to his own, statistical, descriptive, biographical, and historical, with plates, notes, and a voluminous appendix, for which he had begun to collect materials in his early youth, and had got it finished by his sixty-fifth birthday, and of which five copies had been sold in thirteen years.

Then came Bagot, bringing with him, according to previous notice to Tindal, his friend Seager. The latter leers at each officer to whom he is introduced as if he had some secret understanding with him, and stares at little Mr Titcherly, as if he were some curious fossil ; but Tindal being a sporting man, and as there exists a free-masonry among sporting men, he and Seager understand one another at the first glance.

The soup was brought in by the head-waiter of the Bush, a man of dignified deportment and mature years—a man who had waited on peers of the realm, county members, judges of assize, sheriffs, and the like, with perfect composure and considerable credit, but who had, within the last week, been frequently informed that he was a muff, an impostor, a precious slow old coach, with other vituperative

epithets, tending greatly to stagger his self-confidence.

"We won't wait for the other fellows," said Tindal, as they sat down to table. "Fane seldom favours us with his company, and Sloperton's always late. I believe he takes a couple of hours to dress. Gad, sir, life's too short for that sort of humbug, in my opinion."

"By the Lord," said Bagot, "if I was sure of living to the age of what's-his-name (that old beggar, you know), I wouldn't spend a minute more in that way than I do at present, and that's not much. And yet I know some old swells (fellows a precious deal older than me) who get regularly made up by their servants two or three times a-day, and actually think they put their clocks back that way."

"Take some sherry, Lee," said Tindal; "you'll find it deuced bad, I'm afraid."

"Infernal stuff!" said Wylde Oates.

"They say," said Bruce, "that good wine needs no bush, but the Bush is terribly in need of good wine. Shall we try a glass together, Mr Seager?"

Here an odour of various compounded perfumes heralded the approach of Sloperton, who bowed to the strangers as he took a chair. Captain Sloperton possessed a face and figure that no young female of the middle or lower ranks could look upon without

presently loving him to distraction. The first time the barmaid of the hotel set eyes on him, she put soy instead of sherry into the soda-water compound she was mixing, and handed it to a thirsty bagman, who, in consequence of drinking it, was very angry at the time, and very sick afterwards. Avenues of ringlets shot out of the doors and windows whenever the captain passed down the street, so that he might almost have fancied himself surrounded by the tendrils of a vineyard. From the number of complimentary epistles in verse and prose he received, one might have supposed that all the valentines written that year in Doddington, after lying in the dead-letter office since the 14th of February, had now been forwarded to him in a body. Some of these he exhibited at mess, and thereby excited considerable envy in the bosom of Cornet Suckling, who would have given his ears for a correspondence of the kind one-tenth as flattering and voluminous. However, the Cornet, thanks to the prestige of his uniform, made more conquests than ever he had done before, and flattered himself he was becoming a Lothario.

"Shut the door, waiter," said Wylde Oates, as the Captain entered, "or we shall have a rush of love-stricken females after him. How did you give 'em the slip, Sloperton?"

"'Tis a wonder they didn't run into him," whispered Bruce, "for the scent's breast-high. What a bore it must be, Sloper, to be so adorable."

Sloperton took quizzing very calmly, setting it down in general to envy. If he had not been so good-looking, it is probable he would have made a much better figure in the world, for he was by no means deficient in intellect. But the admiration so promptly accorded him by that portion of the fair sex who judge chiefly by the eye, had given a confirmed bent to his ideas, and he had sunk irrevocably into a clever trifler.

"Is Fane coming to mess?" asked Bruce of Sloperton.

"Don't know, really," said Sloperton, pulling down his wristbands; "I'm not in his confidence."

"One of yours?" inquired Bagot.

"Yes; a captain of ours," said Oates. "A good fellow, Fane, but infernally superior—deuced deal of reading and information, and all that sort of thing. I've been told he reads two or three hours a-day. You wouldn't guess it though, for he's a capital judge of a horse."

"He's a great favourite, too, with the women, if he only knew it," remarked Sloperton, speaking slowly, and with a graceful lisp. "I've known some

of 'em quite spooney on him. If he only took the trouble to follow up his advantages, and would bestow a little more pains in dressing himself, I don't know anybody that I should consider a more formidable rival."

"Well, sir," said Seager, impatient at the Captain's conceit, and going on with a story he had begun before his entrance, "the night before the race, Tommy came to me. 'Mis'r Seager,' says he, 'you and I have done a little business together many a time, and I'd as soon do you a friendly turn as any man. Well, I ought to know something about that 'ere hoss, but I don't say nothing, only hedge! Hedge!' says Tommy, holding up his forefinger, and giving me a warning look. 'You're a trump, Tommy,' I said, 'and hedge I will, for I never knew you wrong yet;' and hedge I did. Gad, sir, 'twas lucky I did so, or I should have been two thousand to the bad—as it was, I netted a hundred and fifty. The favourite wasn't even placed."

"Nothing like a friend at court in these cases," said Tindal.

"Ah, you're right, Major," said Seager; "and I flatter myself no man has more useful acquaintances of that sort than I have. It's astonishing what an effect a little condescension, and an occasional tip judiciously administered, has among fellows of

that sort, when it comes from somebody who knows the tricks of the trade. A greenhorn, now, might give twenty pounds to an understrapper in a stable for a bit of information, and the fellow would pocket it, and put his tongue in his cheek and laugh at him for a confounded fool — while a knowing one, by bestowing five, might get a hint worth a thousand."

"You've been a good deal on the turf, eh?" said Wylde Oates, who venerated men who had been a good deal on the turf. Seager grinned, and said he should rather think he had.

"Do you know Dakins?" asked Oates. Seager said he knew him well.

"Ah," said Oates, "he's a great friend of mine. Good fellow, Dakins."

"Splendid fellow," said Cornet Suckling, plunging head over heels into the conversation, and eager to boast his intimacy with the redoubted Dakins. "Do you remember a bay colt of his by Cocktail?"

"Bay, with white fore-legs?" said Seager. "Yes; I remember him."

"I bought him," said Suckling, with ill-suppressed exultation. "Deuced fine horse—dam by Orville."

"Dam by Orville," repeated Mr Seager. "Ah, indeed; I shouldn't have thought he was ever worth a dam."

Mr Suckling feebly attempted to join in the laugh

that followed Mr Seager's sally, and muttering "Fine horse now—greatly improved since he was a colt," retired precipitately from the dialogue. When he reappeared, it was in a desperate attempt to retrieve his position in the eyes of Seager, by calling the unfortunate head-waiter a "lubber," as that hapless functionary placed a decanter before him. Then, in a reassured tone, he called out "Seager, a glass of wine."

"Horrid beastliness!" said Suckling, setting down his glass after drinking it, and imagining he was quite safe in abusing the wine as everybody else had already condemned it.

"I'm sorry you don't like it, young gentleman," said Bagot, majestically. "It has been liked by good judges. 'Tis some I brought over from the Heronry, Tindal—hope you'll excuse the liberty, old fellow; but I knew the kind of article that was to be got here."

Snub the second for Mr Suckling, whose forehead broke out into copious perspiration, while he felt a horrid sensation all over his body, as if his flannel waistcoat and drawers had been suddenly converted into sandpaper. Wylde Oates added to his discomfiture by telling him he didn't believe he knew cider from Johannisberg.

"Superb sherry," said Sloperton, sipping it; "and

rather different from the medicinal compound we've been in the habit of imbibing here. Waiter!"

"Sir," said the waiter, darting to the rear of the speaker.

"Tell the landlord," said Sloperton, "with my compliments, that his sherry ought to be labelled 'Cholera, two years in bottle.'"

The waiter attempted to smile; but, seeing the perfect gravity of Captain Sloperton's face, he coughed and said, "Very good, sir." He was frequently charged with messages of this description, but was in the habit of suppressing them.

"I hope, Tindal," said Bagot, leaning back in his chair in the intervals of dinner, with his hands stuck in the pockets of his somewhat gorgeous waistcoat—"I hope that this infusion of young blood which you've brought to Doddington will put a little life in the old town and neighbourhood."

"'Twouldn't come before 'twas wanted," responded Tindal; "for really, Lee, really, now, 'pon my life, I was prepared for something confoundedly slow, but this is too bad—too bad." And the Major frowned and shook his head, as if slowness in a town was a high crime and misdemeanour, and, moreover, a personal injury.

"'Twasn't always so," said Bagot. "I remember it a cheerful place enough, twenty or thirty years

ago. Many a jolly dinner have I eaten in this very room, at elections or assizes, or when the militia was out. But I don't know how it is, all the people who had any life in 'em seem to have died off or left the place. I hardly ever come down now—can't stand it, by Jove."

"How is it," remarked Bruce, "that wherever one goes—at least I find it so—the inhabitants always talk as if life and spirit had passed away from their native places? I could almost fancy a troop of aged ghosts, in pigtails, pantaloons, and hessians, mourning over the decline of any place I happen to be quartered in."

"Doddington's not what it was when I was a boy," said Mr Titcherly, waking up, and joining for the first time in the conversation on the introduction of this congenial theme. "And, when I was a boy, old people used to say the same thing; and when those old people were boys, other old people, doubtless, said so too. Perhaps the present generation will tell their grandchildren, forty years hence, that the old town has degenerated sadly since they were young."

"It almost reconciles me to the shortness of existence," said Sloperton, putting his shoulders into his ears, "to know that we probably shan't be here to participate in the regrets of the said grandchildren for the lost excitements of their dissipated ancestors."

"Doddington," said Mr Titcherly, hastily bolting a half-masticated morsel, in his eagerness to enlarge on his favourite theme—"Doddington was once a place of consequence. It had a cathedral and many churches—it had a convent of Grey Friars—it had a priory. It had a charter granted by King John. There are parish registers here extending back to Elizabeth's time. I've read 'em all through many times, and they are worth their weight in gold."

"What a precious old maggot!" whispered Oates to Bruce. "What decayed nut did you pick him out of?"

But Bruce rather enjoyed the old gentleman's reminiscences. The roystering propensities which caused him to fraternise with Oates lay only on the surface of his nature, while far stronger and more characteristic sympathies slumbered, almost unknown to their possessor, underneath. So he encouraged Mr Titcherly to resume the subject.

"I remember the convent I mentioned well," he went on (warming to his work, as Oates said). "It was in excellent preservation when a parcel of modernising meddlers pulled it down, to make way for a new assize-hall—a place, gentlemen, that no human being, except a lawyer, could take an interest in. While they were digging the foundation, I picked up a jawbone, which, I believe, undoubtedly belonged to

Friar Treverton, who flourished in Doddington about four hundred years ago, for the spot where I found it tallies precisely with the place of his burial, mentioned in an old manuscript in my possession."

Once started on this subject, it was not easy to stop Mr Titcherly, and he proceeded to enlarge on the antiquities of Doddington, quite unconscious that he and his topics were alike uninteresting to most of his hearers. The very last audience an antiquary should select is one composed of fast men, who have enough to do to look closely into the present, extracting therefrom all the amusement and excitement it will afford them, and mourning over that portion of it which they are debarred from enjoying, without troubling themselves about the past. Fast men, too, are extending their ranks—the term must be widened, so as to include all the most successful and notorious characters of our time. We have fast speculators, fast statesmen, fast clergymen, who have left the slow Church of England far behind—even history is written nowadays by fast historians, only to show us how incomparably superior the fast present time is to the past, and their works are lauded by fast readers and fast reviewers accordingly. And he who does venture to look back with regret or respect is an obstructive, a dreamer, a fit object for scorn to point its slow and moving finger at. How,

then, could humble Mr Titcherly, who could find interest even in the mortal remains of a long-defunct Friar Treverton, hope for attention?

The truth is, I'm afraid, that the fast men of the time don't take much interest in anything—whether it is that the objects which engross them are not such as to call for much enthusiasm, whether they think the expression of it vulgar, or whether they haven't got any to express, I leave to the observant reader to determine.

"Without going quite so far back as all that," said Bagot, "you, Mr Titcherly, must remember when Doddington was more alive than it now is—when the society was better. You remember Squire Oldport, and General Chifney, and Parson Hardbottle, and old Jack Petrock, the little king of Doddington, who carried the corporation in his pocket, and a dozen other jolly fellows who would have been hand-and-glove with their military visitors in two days."

"To be sure," returned the old gentleman, chuckling and rubbing his hands. "They were my contemporaries; I was at school with 'em all, and now they are all gone—some dead, some living elsewhere. No wonder the place seems duller to me."

"I confess, Colonel Lee," said Sloperton, "I don't so much regret the absence of the excellent old

persons you mention, as of their female descendants. I haven't made acquaintance with a single young lady above the rank of a postmaster's daughter. By the by, may I ask, Colonel, who those ladies were that we saw with you a day or two since?" (Sloperton knew perfectly well, having made most minute inquiries on the subject from the waiter.)

"My niece-in-law, Lady Lee," answered Bagot, "and two friends of hers. Fine women, sir. She's the widow of my poor nephew, Sir Joseph Lee."

"Baronetcy of 1600," murmured Mr Titcherly; "one of James's creation—see appendix."

"A charming trio, indeed," said the Captain. "Not many of the sort down here, I'm afraid."

"Well, there's one comfort in a quarter of this sort," observed Seager to Sloperton, who sat next him — "you can wear out all your old clothes, and so get a pull upon your tailor. 'Twould be throwing pearls before swine to bring the new cuts down here."

"Yes, that's one advantage," answered the Captain; "and another is, the chance of picking up some country beauty with a lot of money—something unsophisticated, you know, for one gets sick of your knowing women; one sees so plainly what they're at, you know—that is, any one who understands them. A sharp woman, with her clever de-

signs upon one's heart, always reminds me of the what-d'ye-call-em bird—the flamingo, I think—that puts its head in the sand, and thinks the hunters can't see him. Now, one would like to have an affair with something simple and innocent, if it were only for a change; and if there was money enough with it, why, one might be induced to—a—a —sacrifice one's-self on the altar of Hymen."

"What an infernal puppy!" thought Mr Seager. "Lucky fellow that gets Lee's niece," said he aside to the Captain. "Lots of money, lots of beauty, and lots of good-breeding—no mistake about that. Lee knows what she's worth, and looks precious sharp after her, I can tell you."

"More fool he, I should think," said Sloperton. "What business has he to look after her?"

Seager winked, and gave him a poke with his elbow. "I'll tell you all about it by and by," he said; "wait till we get an opportunity."

This did not offer itself till after they had left the table. But first a variety of topics were discussed, of the same nature as those decided in the answers to correspondents of sporting newspapers. Then there were some arguments conducted after the true mess fashion—that is to say, remarkable rather for confident assertion, tenacity of opinion, and bold denial, than for learning, logic, or deli-

beration; and in the course of which it was definitively settled by the majority, that the Prussians got deuced well thrashed at the battle of Blenheim; that Sheridan was saved from going to prison by selling his poem of the *Rambler* to his landlady for fifty pounds; that Sitwell of the Rifles won the Grand Military in an orange cap, and not in a white one; and that brandy-and-water, as hot as you could drink it, was a capital thing for gout in your stomach. This last curious medical fact was decided in the bar, where they stopt for a few moments on their way to the lodgings of Mr Wylde Oates (Mr Titcherly having taken his leave), to exchange a few compliments with the young lady who presided there, and to charge the waiter to follow them forthwith with a supply of wine, brandy, soda-water, and cigars.

Wylde Oates and Bruce jointly occupied apartments in the house of a Dissenting grocer, somewhat disposed to asceticism in his religious views, and who was sorely troubled how to reconcile the harbouring of these reprobates beneath his roof, with his allegiance to the tabernacle he frequented, and of which he was an important pillar. He partially satisfied his conscience for his toleration of them, by assuring his wife in private that the young men were workers of iniquity, and, to his certain knowledge, would

eventually be broken to pieces like a potter's vessel; while the wife, who, from a natural softness of disposition, did not take the same religious pleasure in contemplating the perdition of her fellow-creatures, attempted to excuse them by saying they were "great sperits." On the first day of their taking possession, the good woman had greatly diverted the youngsters by coming up, about three o'clock in the afternoon, and asking them at what hour they would like their tea. "Gad, Bruce," said Mr Oates, "fancy us fellows drinking tea, like a couple of old washerwomen—good idea, isn't it?" On the present occasion the grocer had caused his wife to sit up for their lodgers, and she, opening the door at their knock, was horrified at seeing the two "great sperits" attended by seven other sperits, evidently not come there for the purpose of sleeping, and making such a noise in their passage up-stairs that they woke the grocer, who, before he went to sleep again, consoled himself by a pious vision, wherein he saw the whole party undergoing the fate of Dives.

The sitting-room the youths occupied had a snug respectable air about it, rather at variance with the character and pursuits of the occupants. The chairs and sofas were of a hardness and neatness rather calculated to mortify the flesh than to invite repose. A print of the Rev. John Styles over the mantel-

piece, with no shirt-collar, a guileless face, and a collarless coat, appeared somewhat out of place between two favourite works of art belonging to Mr Oates—"The Pet of the Ballet," and "Taking a Rasper;" and it really seemed marvellous how the reverend gentleman could preserve such a bland saintliness of aspect, with an opera-dancer of meretricious appearance, pointing her toe indelicately at him on one side, and a reprobate in a red coat riding furiously towards him on the other.

Immediately on the arrival of the waiter with a supply of liquor and a punch-bowl, Mr Oates proceeded to compound scientifically that seductive liquor called claret-cup, after a valuable and unique receipt bequeathed to him by his departed father; while Bruce, stripping the covers from half-a-dozen packs of cards, arranged a table for whist.

"What's this?" inquired Sloperton, taking up a pamphlet in a brown paper wrapper from a table, between his finger and thumb. "It smells confoundedly of bacon."

"That's a tract," said Mr Oates, with intense disgust, "left here by our precious prig of a landlord."

"He leaves 'em regularly twice a-week," said Bruce, "and they certainly do smell of the shop in a double sense. The last one was called

A Finger-Post to Heaven, and this is *The Saintly Stoker*. I didn't wish to be rude to him, as he probably means it for civility, so I told him I was afraid I must defer the perusal of them for the present, being engaged in reading the *Vicar of Wakefield*, which book I mentioned on account of its decorous title not being likely to shock his prejudices; but he turned up his eyes and told me 'he feared that vicars were little better than whited sepulchres.'"

"Infernal canting humbug!" said Bagot. "He took £20 for his vote last election, to my knowledge. Where do you hang out, Captain Sloperton?"

"Why," answered Sloperton, "I've had considerable bother about my lodgings. I was obliged to leave a house on the second day, after paying a week in advance, because the family were addicted to onions; and I was expelled from a second lodging, otherwise comfortable enough, by a crying baby. I give you my word, sir, 'twas a perfect cherub, and continually did cry. Imagine my feelings, on getting settled a little in a third place, at detecting the servant-maid—a maid whose face and hands actually shone with grease, and who, in fact, had a person altogether perfectly glutinous—fancy my feelings at detecting her in the very act of using my hairbrushes. She did, by Jove, sir!"

Here Sloperton took Seager aside under pretence of getting advice about some turf business, but in reality to renew the subject of Bagot's connection with Lady Lee ; and Seager managed so well for Bagot's interest, that he left Sloperton impressed with a due sense of the importance of the Colonel's countenance and friendship, to any one who should entertain matrimonial designs upon her ladyship, as an indispensable preliminary to success.

"Would it be easy to get an introduction there?" asked the Captain, stroking his mustache.

"Ask Lee, there ; he's the keeper of the seraglio. Here, Lee," called out Seager, "here's an applicant for a ticket of admission to the Heronry."

"Oh, demmit," quoth the Captain, "don't put it in that way. But really, Colonel, I should take it as a great favour if you would authorise me to call."

"To be sure!" cried the Colonel ; "come over to lunch on Wednesday—come all of you—and I'll get up an expedition into the country somewhere. Nothing like a riding-party for making people acquainted with each other."

Tindal was delighted with the prospect of the visit, and took Bagot aside.

"That Miss Payne, now, that I saw with you, Lee," said he — "do you know much about her family and prospects, and so forth?"

"Nothing at all," said Bagot; "but I can easily find out, if 'twould oblige you."

"Oh! don't trouble yourself," returned the Major, affecting indifference; "I merely asked from curiosity. Splendid woman!" he went on; "I don't know when I've been so struck with the appearance and manner of any one."

"Take care!" said Bagot. "I always observe 'tis a serious thing when a man past his verdant days takes a fancy to a girl. He always thinks himself so infernally knowing, that he won't take advice, whereas a young one sometimes will. You should have seen her take her first lesson in riding yesterday, Tindal. Gad, sir, you'd have been enchanted!"

"Yes!" said Tindal, eagerly—"Yes! How did she get on?"

"Never saw such pluck in my life—*ne*-ver saw any girl so thoroughly game. By Jove, Tindal, I'm half in love with her myself!" And Bagot related with great zest, and much to the admiration of the deeply interested Major, the events which attended the commencement of Orelia's first lesson.

The claret-cup, pleasant and insidious as that of Circe, was partaken of with much devotion by all, except Bagot and Tindal, who, being older stagers, and knowing that present nocturnal pleasure would

be purchased at an exorbitant amount of morning headache in imbibing that bewitching liquor, stuck to their brandy-and-water. It was when the whist came to a conclusion, and the effects of the exhilarating bowl became evident in increased rashness in betting, desire for chicken-hazard on the part of Oates, coupled with impatience at the non-appearance of supper, that Mr Seager took occasion to enlarge on the merits of a little English mare he had lately purchased—a perfect marvel of a trotting mare, considering, as he said, that she was English. "I don't know what she can do," said Seager, "for I forget to time her; but I fancy she took me something like seventeen miles within the hour."

"Take care, my boy!" said Bagot. "Are you sure of that? *I* don't know any English mare that can trot seventeen miles an hour."

"Bet you an even fifty she won't do it again," said Wylde Oates.

"Well, it's my opinion she can," said Seager, "and I don't mind backing my opinion."

"I wouldn't bet about time," said Sloperton, who was somewhat flustered from drinking; "but I have a horse that I rather fancy can gallop a bit, and I don't mind making a match with you."

"No," said Seager, "she can't gallop, she's a trot-

ing mare. But I'll back her to trot half a mile while your horse gallops three quarters, if you'll give me fifty yards."

This proposition was discussed in a variety of forms and modifications. Seager was secure of his mare's powers; and Sloperton, besides being somewhat excited by his share of the claret-cup, was anxious to produce a favourable impression on Bagot, by making what he fancied a judicious sporting bet. Next to his reputation as a man of fashion, Sloperton piqued himself on his judgment in betting, and luckily he was rich enough to indulge this propensity without so much imprudence as sporting men occasionally exhibit. So Wylde Oates, having risked his fifty against Seager's, and the latter being drawn, with what looked like rashness (though that was the last infirmity which Seager could ever be accused of), to offer to back his mare for a thousand, to do one mile more—*i. e.*, eighteen in the hour—Sloperton took him up; and after some discussion the wager stood in a double form, as entered in Mr Oates's betting-book, thus:—

"Slop. bets Seag. £500 the horse Bouquet gallops three-quarters of a mile before the mare Goshawk trots half-a-mile, less twenty-five yards—to come off within two months."

"Ditto bets ditto £1000, said mare, Goshawk,

does not trot eighteen miles within the hour—also within two months."

Bagot, too, made an entry to the same effect—though that was needless, for circumstances afterwards caused the bet to impress itself strongly on Bagot's memory.

After a little more betting, the waiter from the hotel was heard knocking at the door, and demanding to know when they would like supper? and Wylde Oates, putting out his head, delivered an order for a variety of stimulative delicacies forthwith, winding up with "a devil, and lots of broiled bones."

"Broiled bones!" ejaculated the grocer, beneath the bed-clothes—"ah, little do the poor lost creatures think whose bones are predestined to be broiled; and a devil too—why, it's quite prophetic!" and the grocer smiled as he turned drowsily on his pillow.

It was near morning when the dog-cart was brought out, and Seager and Bagot mounted into it, the former taking the reins, for the Colonel was hardly fit to drive, especially as there were some sharp turns in the road. Then, bidding their military friends good-night, they rattled off, the silent street echoing hollowly as they sped along.

"Not a bad night's business," said Seager; "I look on the fifteen hundred and fifty as safe—the mare can do it easy. In a day or two, you and I will go down quietly and have a look at her."

CHAPTER XI.

The ladies had, as Bagot knew, projected an expedition on horseback into the country. Telling them of the invitation he had given to his military friends, of their wish to be introduced at the Heronry, and reminding the ladies of the obligation they were under to Tindal in the matter of the riding lessons, he found no difficulty in getting them to admit the dragoons to join the riding-party. Rosa's eyes sparkled at the idea—Orelia gave her imperial sanction—*la reine le veut*—and Lady Lee, though rather indisposed to the forming of new acquaintances, was unwilling to disoblige Bagot. The latter, moreover, in order, as he said, that every Jack might have his Jill, had recruited a couple of young ladies from a neighbouring country-house to join the party.

These were the two Misses Clumber, daughters of Sir Christopher Clumber, Bart., and were (considering they were sisters) remarkably different in char-

acter. Trephina, the eldest, was afflicted with such a perpetual thirst for information, that she applied for it at all founts that offered, without much considering what the quality of the supply might be; and, accordingly, she had imbibed some curious facts, such as are not generally imparted to a young lady. The other, instead of improving her mind, which was naturally so weak as not to be susceptible of much improvement, devoted all her time to the adornment of her person, which was pretty, but not so pretty as she fancied it. They were to join the cavalcade as it passed their lodge-gates.

The Wednesday on which the riding-party took place was one of the last days of May.

The month of May,—the words are hawthorn-scented, causing the most unimaginative reader to dream of green fields and fresh flowers and a warm sun. Poets, since first there sprang such a race in England, have conspired to deck May with sunshine and freshness, and garlands plundered from her neighbour June; and notwithstanding the too often sad realities of east wind and rain—notwithstanding the numbers of betrayed and unfortunate persons who, having, in the trustfulness of their poetic temperaments, been seduced into going a-Maying, return with damp dresses and shivering frames, and colds in their heads—still the people, steadfast in their illu-

sion, blindly believe in the delights ascribed to their favourite month, and, spite of wind and weather, invest her idea with the sweets of Paradise,—she is the pleasant, the merry month of May.

The fact is, the month—naturally an asthmatic, chilly month—has been padded into shape. Every succeeding writer who has occasion to mention her name adds his mite of a flower or a gentle breeze, and thus, insolvent as she is in pleasantness and sunshine, her credit is sustained by a paper-currency.

The May morning that shone on the riding-party was, however, one of the old poetical kind, quite restoring one's confidence in Chaucer—warm, sunny, fresh, musical. The few white clouds that floated across the blue depths were soft and vapoury, melting at their edges into thin grey tissues. There was breeze enough to dissipate and convey abroad the heavy perfumes of the furze on the common and the honeysuckles in the lane, but not enough to scatter the unseen multitudes that filled the air with their humming. Voices from low-lying distant fields came with plain intonation on the ear; so did the cawing of the rooks around the elms in the village across the river, and the rumble of the waggon traversing the bridge.

Rosa, looking forth from the window of the breakfast-room, fresh as one of the roses that bloomed be-

side and around her, saw the cavaliers approaching, their sleek horses glistening in the sun.

Tindal and Sloperton rode first—the former with a slight *soupçon* of the jockey in his costume; the latter, after deliberating so long over his multifarious wardrobe that the others were on the point of starting without him, had decided upon a very quiet though exquisitely-cut suit—grey trousers and waistcoat, black riding-coat and neckcloth, simply relieved by white gloves—for the Captain was fond of affecting a great sedateness both of dress and aspect;—and having thus, unassisted by foreign or adventitious aid, made the desired impression, would subsequently come forth in full radiance, and carry all before him. As he approached the house, he straightened himself in his saddle, drew his knees a little back (for he was a bad rider, and they *would* slip forward out of place), lowered his heels to riding-school trim, and, taking in the whole front of the mansion in one rapid furtive glance, feigned to be unconscious that anybody was looking at him. His position in the saddle, he flattered himself, was admirable; and on reaching the gravel sweep before the entrance, he rode a little in front of his companion, in order that nothing might obstruct the view of his symmetrical proportions, but was sorely disturbed in mind and seat when Bruce and Oates came dashing alongside at a gallop,

and caused his horse Bouquet to curvet unpleasantly, thereby affording great delight to Mr Oates, who whispered to Bruce that "Nobby was deuced near split."

Bagot was in the hall teaching Orelia to play billiards, and, hearing their approach, he came out to the door with a cue in his hand.

"Glorious day, boys!" said he; "dismount and come in."

"Deuced nice house," thought Sloperton, looking round the lofty hall, which reached as high as to the second storey, with a balcony round the upper part, and was so spacious that the billiard-table looked quite small in the midst of the tesselated pavement. Near the table stood the majestic Orelia, holding her cue something after the fashion of a sceptre.

"I needn't introduce Major Tindal," Bagot said to her, as the Major advanced, so much abashed by Orelia's queenliness that his habitual formality stiffened into an almost awkward shyness as he greeted her; while the self-complacent assurance of Sloperton, and the too-easy confidence of Mr Wylde Oates, rebounded from it ineffectually. "Now then, boys, what d'ye say?—beer, after your ride?—capital home-brewed—glass of sherry?—no! then come along to the drawing-room."

"I don't think I mentioned to you that I've the honour to be connected with Lady Lee," said Sloperton to Bagot, as they walked up the broad staircase—"a sort of cousinship."

In fact, Sloperton's father was her mother's first cousin; but the Sloperton family had been so much scandalised at her mother's marrying a country clergyman, that they considered it due to their own dignity, and to the demerits of the offender, to drop all intercourse with her forthwith. Sloperton had reserved the fact of the relationship, in order that he might judge whether the style of her ladyship's house and society would render such a disclosure advisable or not; and we may safely aver that, had these matters not proved to his taste, he would have kept the "sort of cousinship" a profound secret.

"God bless me!" said Bagot, "you don't say so. I didn't know I was bringing you a relation, Hester," he continued, as they entered the drawing-room. "Your cousin, Captain Sloperton."

Lady Lee looked rather surprised. Probably, if she had met the Captain anywhere but in her own house, she would not have acknowledged him, for she happened to know how affairs had stood between her mother and the Sloperton family. But as he appeared as her guest, she took the hand which the Captain proffered for a cousinly shake with sufficient

civility, though without any warmth. "Ah," thought the Captain, "I see—proud, and a little indignant; we'll bide our time." And, merely expressing his sense of good fortune at having made the acquaintance of such a relative, the Captain, with his most bewitching bow, relinquished the hand he held, and stood aside to let his friends make their obeisances.

Perhaps the calm indifference which marked her ladyship's reception of them was as little calculated to encourage the strangers as the stateliness of Orelia. But Rosa's manner was enough of itself to set all at their ease; she never thought about herself or her own dignity, but received each in a smiling friendly fashion that disarmed all criticism, and caused Mr Oates to eulogise her to Bruce, in a whisper, as "a jolly little girl." Bruce and Rosa were friends at the first glance; they were both of them so open, genial, and unembarrassed, that the slight circumstance of their never having met before in their lives, was altogether lost sight of within a quarter of an hour after the introduction.

"Now, then," quoth Bagot, bustling about, "we'll decide where to go, and then to horse forthwith. You must know, gentlemen, that the ladies, before they were aware they were to have the pleasure of your company, had each proposed a different point to ride to; and how they'd have settled it without

us I don't know. I'll just read to you, from these slips of paper, what each had to say in favour of her own choice, and then we'll put the matter to the vote;" and uplifting his double gold eye-glass, he took one of the three slips from the table, and stooping over it, and moving his head, like an antiquary spelling out an old tombstone, as he followed each line, read the contents slowly.

"First we have The Skyrock, one of the mountain ranges you see from the northern windows." (Here Bagot motioned with the double eye-glass in a northerly direction, and then resumed his reading.) "It towers above the others, and from its top you look on three counties and on the sea. There are no trees except some stunted pines and a mountain ash or two; it holds a small lake in the hollow of its hand, as it were, in whose grey steely surface are inverted the dark beetling crags, and the sky, and the clouds. There are no small insignificant beauties to fritter away the attention; all is grand and savage desolation."

It needed not Bagot's friendly wink to inform Tindal that this was Orelia's choice.

"Dairy," Bagot read again, from the next paper, "is the dearest little old-fashioned farm-house in the world—as you will say, when you first catch sight of the corner of its white wall and thatched roof

among the apple-blossoms. There are wide low meadows all around with plenty of flowers and cows, giving promise of such nice cream—and they keep their promise, I can tell you—and the river runs at the margin of them, with islands of yellow gravel parting its clear brown streams, and willows fringing the opposite bank. All round are woods, ancient enough and majestic enough to please even some of our grand and lofty-minded acquaintances." ("Personal, by Jove," interpolated Bagot, and Orelia shook her riding-whip at Rosa, who tried to look demurely unconscious, while Bruce smiled at her intelligently.) "And it is undoubtedly a pleasanter and more cheerful scene, to anybody of proper taste and feeling, than those horrid solemn crags."

"No *ex parte* statements of that sort ought to be allowed," said Orelia.

"Certainly not," said Tindal.

"Nor such low appeals to vulgar tastes, as promises of cream," said Orelia.

"I've a particularly vulgar taste, and like cream excessively," said Bruce.

"The White Fall" (so ran the third paper) "is a cascade shooting out of the rift of a mossy rock, whose faces are all wet with its spray. It is caught in a basin bordered thickly with ferns, from which it drops successively into other basins, till it flows

away out of sight. Ascending by slippery steps cut in the rock, you come suddenly on a ruined abbey standing in front of dark massive woods. The scene unites the sentiments of the grand and antique, with those of the picturesque and familiar."

"There," said Bagot, dropping his glass; "most votes carry it." Having collected them, he declared the state of the poll to be in favour of the last proposition, which had emanated from Lady Lee; and for the White Fall they started forthwith.

Bagot marshalled the cavalcade. Lady Lee, disposed to be agreeable to her companion, Captain Sloperton, glanced at him, to try and guess what style of conversation was likely to suit him. "Dear me, what a handsome man!" she thought, at the first glance; then, after a second, "what a pity the expression was forgotten when that face was designed." Sloperton, aware he was being scrutinised, looked over his horse's head with a face preternaturally composed, as if he were sitting for his portrait, saying nothing; not because he wanted conversation, but for fear of breaking the charm. "Let her look," said Sloperton to himself; "it's only your confounded ugly fellows that are forced to go off at score with the conversation." So he sat perfectly still, except that he turned his profile a trifle

to the left, so as to bring the outline of his nose into more favourable view.

Presently Lady Lee broke into a smile. "Has it no voice, I wonder," thought she, "this military statue of Apollo?" And she waited a little longer to see what time might bring forth; but it brought forth nothing, except the removal of a speck of dust from the Captain's shirt-front with the point of his little finger.

"An amusing piece of sculpture!" thought her ladyship;—"he must have escaped from some wax-work establishment."—"Captain Sloperton," she said, "I'm sure you must be fond of angling."

The Captain turned towards her a face illumined with a smile ineffably sweet, which he suffered to steal gradually over the composure of his aspect. He had known that smile do him yeoman's service ere now, going right through the eyes of a hitherto obdurate lady, till it quivered in her very heart.

"Angling! Why so?" asked the Captain, in his sweetest, softest tone, studying her face in return through his large melancholy black eyes.

"Because Izaak Walton calls it 'the contemplative man's recreation,' and you appear to be a contemplative man," said Lady Lee. "Do you generally pursue your meditations in company or alone?"

"You allude to my silence," said the Captain, with

another smile, this time of bewitching frankness; "but the fact is, I never presume to offer any remark at the commencement of an acquaintance, unless I think it worthy of the hearer. I believe, in this instance, I might have waited till doomsday—and, in fact, I was just beginning to despair, when you spoke. Confess now," said the Captain, gracefully extending his right hand with the palm uppermost, and inclining his head a little to one side, interrogatively as it were, "would you not have considered it an insult to your understanding, if I had begun by remarking, it was a fine day, as if I were an almanac?"

"On the contrary, I should have agreed with the observation very heartily," said Lady Lee. "Do you suppose I expect to find mankind in general carrying the admiration of their hearers by a *coup-de-main*, instead of opening the trenches in form?—like Mr Burke, of whom it was said, that nobody could stand with him under a door-way in a shower of rain without finding him out to be an extraordinary man."

"Burke was an extremely clever fellow," said the Captain, "undoubtedly, but he laboured under a great disadvantage. I believe, from a portrait I have seen of him, that his idea of dress was perfectly ridiculous; in fact, his dress was by no means equally

imposing with his *ad*dress; and who could listen, you know, to a sage in a disreputable coat or a cravat like a poultice?—the idea's absurd."

Lady Lee laughed heartily at the idea of an acquaintance with Stultz being indispensable to the success of a philosopher.

"It is not very long ago," continued the Captain, following up the impression he considered he was making, "since I heard a person who was dining with a friend in the next box to me in a French eating-house, talk so cleverly and amusingly, that I got quite interested in him. I figured to myself, of course, a remarkably well-bred, agreeable person, dressed with unimpeachable taste. At last, after a most capital story, told with charming humour, my curiosity to see him became so great, that I got up in the middle of my dinner (the greatest bore in the world, you will admit) and made an excursion across the room to the bell, expressly to look at the clever unknown. You'll hardly believe me, Lady Lee, when I tell you he had the impudent bad taste to be witty in a—what do you think, now?"

"Carter's frock and hobnailed shoes?" guessed her ladyship, chiming in with his humour.

"Nothing of the kind," said Sloperton. "He wore a brown satin waistcoat with yellow stripes, and a

bright-blue coat with brass buttons, while his hands were like huge slices of beet-root, with carrots at the end for fingers. I naturally lost all interest in him at once,—his jokes, after that, were all tinged, to my fancy, with the vulgarity of his attire. That, now, is a case exactly in point."

Again Lady Lee condescended to smile. The Captain's foibles were new to her, and his ultra-dandyism amused her by its strong contrast with the calm melancholy of his aspect. So she continued to give him her attention—and that he always considered as the natural prelude to a woman's giving him her heart —and went on with increased confidence, till he branched off into the flattering and sentimental vein, in which she thought him decidedly tiresome, though he fancied he had been unusually brilliant.

The Major, riding beside Orelia, with the Corporal at her near rein, to which station she had summoned him, surveyed her with a grave and courteously critical air.

"Upon my word," he said, "either Onslow must be a capital instructor in female equestrianism, or he must have met with a singularly apt pupil. I don't know when I've seen a lady sit so easily and well."

"Pray, give all the praise to Mr Onslow," said Orelia; "and permit me, at the same time, to thank you for giving us such an excellent master."

"Allow me to hope," said Tindal, with the air of one who requests where he may command, "that to-day you will permit me to be your riding-master. We will dispense with Corporal Onslow's services, and—"

"By no means," interrupted Orelia; "I prefer the present arrangement infinitely. That is" (observing the sudden dark flush that overspread the Major's countenance), "I have great confidence in Mr Onslow —and besides, nobody, you know, can serve two masters. Your systems might clash, though both are no doubt excellent. So" (turning to Onslow), "pray remain with us."

Onslow listened to the Major's proposition for dismissing him, and to Orelia's detainer, with the same calm expression which he usually wore when his superiors in rank asserted at all imperiously the distinction between them, and without the slightest appearance of discomposure. It was the expression of one who, knowing well his superiority to the station he filled, felt no irritation at being reminded of it; and this demeanour appeared, in Orelia's eyes, far more dignified than the most tragical exhibitions of wrath, and most magnificent frettings on the curb, could have been. "Confound the fellow!" thought the Major, glancing at his handsome, easy subordinate, "I wish he'd take himself off." But he affected to

smile, as he bowed his acquiescence to Orelia, saying, "her wishes were law to him, and Corporal Onslow should certainly remain—" at all which, a smile might have been noticed, by a keen observer, to dawn on Onslow's face.

From this moment the Major quite ignored the Corporal's presence, trying to converse as if there were no such person within hearing, or in existence: a mode of proceeding which was rendered somewhat difficult by the frequent appeals which Orelia made to Onslow, for his opinion on matters they conversed of—deeply outraging the Major's sense of military etiquette, of which few had stricter notions than himself. But of military etiquette Orelia knew but little; in fact, being, as we have elsewhere hinted, somewhat of a self-willed young lady, she did not permit etiquette of any kind to rule her conduct farther than she pleased; and, accustomed to see in her riding-master one who possessed the manners and language of a gentleman, she had almost dropt out of sight the fact of his real position.

"The filly suits you admirably," said the Major presently to Orelia. "I should think her a little too hot to be pleasant to the generality of riders —but you, Miss Payne, have a particularly light hand."

"So Mr Onslow tells me," said Orelia, "though,

to say the truth, I don't exactly know what a light hand is."

The Major frowned—Onslow again! and Mister too! "You've brought your sketch-book, I see," said he, after a pause—"may we hope for the pleasure of seeing it employed to-day?"

"Certainly," said Orelia. "I always sketch during my rides."

"Might I be permitted a glance?" asked Tindal, extending his hand towards the book. Orelia handed it to him.

"Beautiful!" cried the admiring Major, turning the leaves as the book rested on the pommel of his saddle. "Most masterly, and evidently done with great ease and quickness. If I might venture to say which I prefer, it is this one—principally on account of that group of figures in the foreground."

"You are right, Major Tindal," returned Orelia; "those figures are excellent. I wish I could hope to rival them."

"Dear me, are they not yours?" said the Major, vexed at his blunder.

"They are some that Mr Onslow was so good as to put in," replied Orelia. "Do you not recognise his rather uncommon style?"

"Indeed!—ah, I was not aware," said the Major coldly—and, muttering something about "fine dis-

tances—bold outline—warm skies," he closed the sketch-book, and returned it to the fair proprietor.

"This now," said the Major, presently, pointing with the but-end of his whip at the landscape before them, "allow me to suggest, is a fine subject for a sketch. This clump of trees in the foreground—that white cottage beyond, with the river and those hills in the distance, would in your hands, Miss Payne, make a very beautiful picture."

"So I think," said Orelia; "but Mr Onslow prefers the same view from a point we have just passed. I'm glad to have a champion on my side—pray discuss the matter with him, Major Tindal, and I will abide by the result of the argument."

"Really," said the Major, reddening and frowning, "I am—a—a—not accustomed to—a—you must excuse me, Miss Payne—" and reining suddenly back, on pretence of the narrowness of the road, he rode by himself, much chafed in temper, at some distance behind.

"Your kind notice of me is most flattering," said Onslow, in a low voice, to Orelia—"and, believe me, I feel it deeply. But will you pardon me for saying, that I anticipate consequences which may cause me to regret the display of your goodness."

Orelia turned her face severely and scornfully upon him. "It is I," she said, "who have reason to regret

that I should have bestowed any notice on one who is capable of such an anticipation as fear on his own account. I could not have imagined any one guilty of such a mean feeling. You have shown me my error, and you shall certainly have no cause to fear a repetition of it."

Most men would have been abashed at the scorn with which Orelia turned her face from him as she concluded her speech; but Onslow, smiling, said, "You mistake me, indeed. I would not weigh any consequence to myself against your lightest word. But what I do anticipate is, that the Major, in his evident displeasure, may deprive me of the opportunity of further enjoying the society I have found so"—(he did not say what)—"and may thus," he added, sadly and half-absently, "close suddenly for me the brief vision of paradise that has opened on the dull reality of my life."

Orelia coloured a little at this warmth of expression. "Pardon me," she said; "I was too hasty, and did you wrong. I should indeed regret to be deprived of the benefit of your instructions. We will mollify this doughty chief of yours, and cause him to forget his wrath." And accordingly reining up, and summoning the Major to her, under pretence of showing him some interesting feature in the scenery, she condescended, in a somewhat haughty indifferent way, to

smooth his ruffled plumes, and, giving him no further cause for ire, except once or twice, when she forgot herself, and dragged Onslow into the conversation, succeeded to a miracle.

Bruce and Rosa rode together in great harmony, followed at a little distance by Wylde Oates and Letitia Clumber. This latter young lady, besides being naturally stupid, and a very uncongenial spirit for the rattling Mr Oates to encounter, was now particularly indisposed to make herself agreeable, in consequence of pining after the society of Sloperton, for whom she had, at first sight, conceived a warm admiration, which, she was satisfied, wanted only opportunity to become mutual. So at last, Oates, after giving her a description of a steeple-chase which she scarcely even pretended to listen to, and catching her yawning while he was telling her of a wager he had lately won, wherein he had displayed great sagacity, rode on with her to join the pair in front.

"Hang it, Bruce!" he whispered, as he came alongside; "fair play, you know. Deuce take me, if I can stand that simpering doll any longer, and there are you chatting away with that jolly little thing like a couple of magpies, and not caring a curse about me. Turn about's fair play. You let me ride with her for the rest of the way out, and you shall be her companion all the way back." And Bruce, acknowledging

the justice of this arrangement, went accordingly to do penance with Miss Letitia, while Rosa cast after him a glance of regret, which Mr Oates would have thought anything but flattering to himself if he had seen it; for Rosa had discovered that Bruce's sentiments on most matters were entirely identical with her own—that they had the same tastes in pictures and books and scenery—at least, he had always agreed warmly with her expressed opinions—and, in fact, they had got on very pleasantly together.

Bagot was the most ill-matched of the party. Poor old Bagot, having paired off the others to their satisfaction, had good-naturedly undertaken Trephina Clumber, who, with her usual desire for information, had put him, as he termed it, "through his facings" on the subject of the history of horse-racing—its origin, progress, &c., with incidental questions on the feeding of horses and rules of the turf. And Bagot, who had never, even on this his favourite subject, troubled himself with any historical retrospect, was sorely puzzled to reply, and, answering at hazard, communicated to her a fund of information on these heads more curious than correct, as may be seen to this day in the pages of Miss Trephina's journal, where she was accustomed to note down at night all the treasures of knowledge acquired during the day; in which are chronicled, among others, the not generally known

facts, that the first King's Plate was run for in the time of Oliver Cromwell, and that Old King Cole was one of the earliest patrons of the turf.

The cascade was reached and duly admired—not on horseback, of course, but the steeds were fastened to trees, while their riders walked along the rocky path that led to it. And the fountain below the cascade was a wishing-well, with a legend attached to it, which Lady Lee related, and afterwards they dipt their hands in it and wished silently; and it came to pass that some of them, in the fulness of time, had their wishes granted, and some had not.

When they dismounted, the Corporal prudently turned his horse's head and rode homewards.

Leaving the fountain, they ascended the steps of the rock, and found lunch, which Noble had brought in a spring-cart, awaiting them under an oak; and afterwards the lady artists produced their sketch-books. Trephina Clumber, without any natural taste or talent for drawing, practised the art with a wonderful pertinacity. She had studied innumerable books on light and shade, and colour and perspective, and the human form, and the anatomy of animals, and, in fact, perhaps muddled herself with her researches in art, for they resulted in productions quite unlike anything in nature. She seated herself under a tree, and sent Bagot to fetch her some water in a tin cup, while she

arranged her colour-box and brushes alongside. Then she made a sketch, and all the time she was so employed she lectured the Colonel so learnedly on keeping, and aerial distances, and mellowness, and warm effects, and handling, that he felt very little doubt that Trephina was a very great artist, and was somewhat ashamed of himself when, on looking at the drawing afterwards, he took a remarkable cloud in her sky for a wooded mountain—and her own horse, which she had introduced in the foreground, for a goat—mistaking the crutches of the side-saddle for the animal's horns. However, her familiarity with the terms of art quite blinded Bagot to these little defects in her practice, and caused him to regard her as a female Claude. And many greater reputations than Trephina's are constantly established on precisely similar foundations.

Lady Lee, perhaps not finding Captain Sloperton's conversation in harmony with the scene, sauntered away by herself towards the margin of the stream above the cascade. Before her lay a broad pool, where the stream, though swift, was silent, and which was crossed by large stones at irregular intervals. Between these the water poured smoothly, and flowed rippling out of sight. In the broken water below the stones a fly-fisher was planted, assiduously practising his art. Up the stream the water darkened to deep-

est brown, as it passed beneath overhanging willows. Lady Lee remembered that, by crossing to the other side, a new and pleasing point of view was obtained, and she accordingly began stepping from one stone to another.

When about half-way across, a stone rolled over and sunk, just as she was in the act of quitting it, and a little extra agility was required to attain the next one. Congratulating herself on escaping without a dip in the water, she stood here, as on a pedestal, admiring the view, which was at this point much more expanded than on the bank she had just quitted, enabling the observer to trace the stream through many a winding, and showing new undulations in the surface of the woods. Having sufficiently enjoyed it, she turned to retrace her steps—and then, for the first time, perceived that the displacement of the stone had rendered this a difficult task. The provoking pebble lay just beneath the surface, with a sharp corner uppermost, rendering it quite unsafe as a support, and the interval to the next one was too wide to be attempted. She was unwilling to call for assistance, partly because the situation seemed to her to involve a little absurdity; secondly, because she dreaded being the object of the gallant efforts which the cavaliers would be sure to make for her rescue. So she began plumbing the

stream with her riding-whip, and, after poking unsuccessfully to replace the faithless stone, gathered her dress round her, and half meditated a spring.

She made up her mind to it seven times, and seven times her heart failed her, leaving her precisely where she was. How often the process might have been repeated is doubtful; but just then she heard a splashing in the water close at hand. The fly-fisher, perceiving her dilemma, was wading to her assistance.

This fly-fisher was by no means an ordinary kind of fly-fisher. He was a handsome, noble-looking man about thirty, with a light mustache, and was as unmistakably a gentleman in his tweed shooting-jacket and wide-awake hat, as if he had been dressed in a coronet and robes. Now, if he had considered a moment, he might have rendered the necessary service to her ladyship by replacing the stone in its old position. Perhaps if Lady Lee, instead of appearing to him more charming than any nymph that ever haunted a stream, had been a respectable old lady with black mittens and a brown wig, he would have done so; perhaps it did not occur to him; perhaps he preferred taking his own course;—however, with no other preliminaries than a bow and a few words of apology, half lost in the murmur of the waters, he took her ladyship in his arms. One would have

thought it would have been quite sufficient to carry her to the next stone, and leave her to pursue her way—and it is believed she did make a representation to that effect; but her speech, like his, was lost in the noise of the stream, and he only relinquished his fair burden (which perhaps he liked) when landed safely on the bank. Then, with a few words expressing his sense of "his own good fortune in being of the slightest service," and a rather confused offer of thanks from her ladyship, he, with another bow, went back to his fishing, and her ladyship rejoined her friends, to whom, for some reason or other, she said nothing of her adventure.

They lingered, admiring, chatting, and sketching about the wooded slopes above the cascade, until evening began to shadow the landscape, and to show the broken arches and ruined walls of the abbey strongly relieved against the sky, which gleamed purply through the spaces left originally by the builder, and those made since by Time the unbuilder. Orelia looked on it in an artistic light, and admired the breadth and softness of the shadows, the still brown depths of the river, with a grey glassy gleam where the sky was reflected—the golden scatterings of light where the sunset still lingered on the woody hills, and the clouds just beginning to put off their evening robes of orange and crimson and gold, as the ruler of

the day descended out of sight. Lady Lee looked at it in a sentimental point of view, thinking of the old monks who had seen the sun set behind those slopes, who had wandered through those woods, and had dreamed away their lives in those shattered cells; feeling a sort of sadness mixed with the beauty of the scene, as imaginative people do, when the departing day looks on the ancient abodes of departed beings. And Rosa, who was neither sentimental nor artistic, felt a pleasure she did not seek to define in the stillness and freshness and clearness of air, earth, and sky, and chirped forth her gladness unconsciously and unrestrainedly as the nightingale who was giving life to the neighbouring woods.

Bagot experienced a mixed feeling, compounded of a desire for brandy-and-water and billiards, and a fear that the dewy grass was a bad thing for the gout; so he managed to get them to horse, and to proceed homeward; and when they reached the Heronry, they had a sort of meal compounded of dinner and tea—too informal for the first, and too solid for the last; and then, after some music from the ladies and Sloperton, who sung to the guitar with a clear and sad, though utterly unmodulated and inexpressive voice, the dragoons rode home, all of them well pleased.

Tindal was pleased, because he had latterly found

Orelia's manner and conversation entirely to his taste ; for the slight haughtiness, and occasional symptoms of imperious temper that she displayed, had of themselves a certain charm for him, harmonising well, perhaps, with the main chords of his own character. Moreover, he purposed putting an effectual stop to the Corporal's lessons immediately.

Bruce and Wylde Oates were both pleased, because they had found in Rosa exactly what her face promised, and their respective shares of her society had been apportioned on the most equitable principles.

Sloperton was pleased, because he considered he had been particularly charming. "I'm a little past thirty," said the Captain to himself, "and the variety of these love affairs is getting fatiguing. I've been thinking for some time of settling down quietly whenever I could find a proper person—and yesterday I discovered a white hair in my right whisker. Gad, I may turn grey or bald, and my chances will be diminished twenty per cent." So the Captain resolved to fascinate Lady Lee, and viewed the design with the calm confidence of a powerful mesmerist about to set to work upon a subject of nervous and susceptible temperament.

CHAPTER XII.

On regaining his quarters on the evening of the riding-party, Onslow, in spite of the *nonchalance* which marked his general demeanour, displayed in his manner some degree of agitation.

He was billeted at the "Grapes"—a cosy, snug, old-fashioned hostelry, hid away up a by-lane, which was entered from the main street of Doddington by an arch at one end, and which had no passage through at the other—a rambling old building full of dark passages, with steps in the darkest parts, causing those who traversed them swiftly and unsuspectingly to receive shocks extending from the soles of their feet to the crowns of their heads, and making their teeth chatter violently, unless the tongue happened to be interposed between them, like the passengers' bodies between two fast trains running into each other on a railway. The kitchen was always illumined by a sort

of comfortable twilight, partly the result of a high wall opposite the windows excluding the sun, partly from the steams of soups, roast meats, mulled beer, and wines, and coffee, that hovered incessantly over the hospitable region. When the eye got accustomed to the place, a stout form might generally be espied, seated in the thickest of the clouds by the fireside. This was the landlord of the "Grapes," who, under the firm impression that he was diligently carrying on the business, and acting as the prop and main-stay of the establishment, spent most of his time by the fireside in an easy-chair, diversifying the somewhat limited prospect by an occasional stroll out under the archway to look at the weather. A life of this sort, though well adapted to the purposes of a *paté de foie gras*, would not, at first sight, appear favourable to the healthy operations of the animal economy; nevertheless, it seemed to agree with the host of the "Grapes," if one might judge from the rosy complexion that appeared in the midst of a white fringe of hair and whisker, and the regularity and unfailing zest with which he responded to the call to dinner. That meal took place in a little glass-walled room, like a gastronomic conservatory, looking into the kitchen, presided over by a pretty young lady, the future heiress of the "Grapes," for mine host, like Polonius, had "one fair daughter and no more." Her attractions, of

which her reputed expectations formed perhaps not the least, drew numerous gallants to the bar of the "Grapes," who vied with each other in drinking various spirituous compounds mixed by her fair hands, and seemed to imagine that their success would be proportionate to the frequency and recklessness of their orders for drink—an impression which caused all but suitors of very strong head and constitution to retire from the contest, after probations of more or less duration.

Before the dragoon entered, two admirers were signalising their devotion to the fair spirit of the bar, the upper half of whose person only was visible, as she dispensed the potables which formed her peculiar charge through a portion of the glass frame of her shrine that slid back, leaving a space wherein the worshippers might lean their elbows and deposit their glasses. One of these was an attorney's clerk—a very dashing personage, with a bushy head of hair, and a hat stuck rakishly thereon; the other a young farmer, who had lately spent more time at the "Grapes" than in agricultural pursuits: he wore a white hat, a brown cut-away with basket buttons, and a blue satin stock, with a great pin sticking in the folds of it. These rivals had held a sort of wordy tilt of sarcasm on each other, in which the clerk's astuteness gave him a decided advantage over the other admirer; but the

latter drank most, appending to his demand for each successive glass the words "damn the expense," indicative of wealth and a liberal spirit; and he was, moreover, the better-looking of the two. On whichever side the balance of fascination might have been, the ministering angel of the bar did not, however, betray any preference, but filled their glasses, and listened to their speeches, with the most laudable impartiality.

While she was in the act of squeezing a lemon into the rum-and-water of the incipient attorney, a clanking step was heard outside, approaching from the archway. The fair bar-maid gave a little start, and spilt some of the hot mixture on her hand. This served to excuse the blush that overspread her plump face as the Corporal entered.

"Good evening, Mr Onslow," said the pretty bar-maid, in a tone, and with a bright smile, that would have induced either of the two rivals to drink himself into insensibility on the spot, and have thought it cheap too. But the dragoon, nodding at her in an absent way, and merely replying, "How d'ye do, Susan?" strode to the fireplace, and planted himself there, with his back to the fire.

Now, the landlord did not admire the dragoon, though his wife and daughter did. The landlord was a man of great weight and consideration with

those who frequented his inn, and always exacted a full measure of respect from them, never permitting even those who might be called his cronies to venture on any undue familiarity. But this dragoon, though civil enough, in a condescending sort of way, to the landlady and her daughter, showed no more respect for his portly host than if he had been a stable-boy. Accordingly, that dignitary, with a grunt indicative of displeasure and defiance, drew back his chair a foot or two, and scowled at the dragoon over his pipe. He might have scowled at the warming-pan that glittered on the wall beyond with about as much effect. Onslow, his legs apart, his back to the fire, his look bent on the floor, thoughtfully whistled an opera tune, as if no such person as the landlord of the "Grapes" were in existence.

Opposite the landlord was seated a lodger of much consideration and long standing in the "Grapes." He was a bachelor, with a small annuity, which he spent principally in rum-and-water—a hard-featured, red-faced man, with a couple of marks like gashes extending from his nostrils deep down each cheek. From his long residence at the "Grapes," his habits were so well known that he never had occasion to give an order; and, being of taciturn habits, this was a great comfort to him. Between breakfast and dinner he always had three glasses of rum-and-water;

between dinner and supper, six; and after supper his tumbler was replenished, till he was carried off to bed on the waiter's back.

This gentleman had finished his eighth tumbler about five minutes before, and the landlady—a fat good-tempered woman, with a face and figure very like the reflection of her daughter's, as seen in the convex surfaces of the shining dish-covers hanging to the wall (*i. e.*, considerably widened and shortened)—glanced at the clock, and brought him his ninth, or last before supper.

"We don't see much of you now, Mr Onslow," said the landlady, standing before him, after she had set down the lodger's glass on the table.

The landlord uttered a short derisive chuckle. He was a man of few words; but the laugh indicated that, in his opinion, it was very little matter whether they saw anything of him at all or not. The dragoon, softly whistling, twirled his mustache absently, and did not notice either the remark or the laugh.

"You're certainly in love, Mr Onslow," said the landlady. "You used to be the politest man—and now one never gets a word from you."

There was a giggle from the daughter in the bar; but still the trooper made no answer, till the lodger, who had a chivalrous respect for the landlady, touched

the dragoon's sleeve with the stem of his pipe. Onslow stared at him, and drew back from the contact, when he motioned with the pipe towards the landlady, to signify that she had done him the honour of addressing him. Then the dragoon lifted up his eyes, and, appearing to perceive the landlady for the first time, nodded to her, bid her good evening, and strode through the kitchen on his way to his own room. "He's certainly in love," said the landlady: "I never saw a man so changed."

He had scarcely disappeared, when the daughter, taking a letter from a shelf in the bar, said, "Law, mother, I forgot to give Mr Onslow his letter—I'll just take it to him;" and, leaving the young farmer and the incipient attorney to entertain one another, she tript after the dragoon.

"Come in," said Onslow, when she tapt at the door, and she entered. The room, thanks, probably, to the young lady's partiality for the handsome lodger, was a very comfortable one—a nice little bed, with dimity curtains, washing-stand, toilet-table, all complete, with some pictures on the walls.

"Here's a letter come since you were away," said the pretty bar-maid, handing it to him.

"Thank you, Susan," said Onslow, "much obliged," and immediately broke the seal, which was a large one, with a coat of arms.

The landlady's daughter was dying to know who the correspondent with the great seal could be, so she lingered, under pretence of brushing the dust off the furniture, till he had finished reading it.

"No bad news, I hope, Mr Onslow?" she said, when he had refolded and laid it on the chimney-piece.

"Quite the contrary, Susan; it assures me I have still a friend, and that's good news," said Onslow, smiling.

"Oh, gracious! I'm sure, Mr Onslow, you might have plenty if you liked—it's your own fault if you haven't," said the pretty bar-maid.

Onslow had relapsed into thought, and did not respond to this complimentary opinion.

"I got the book of poems" (I'm afraid the pretty bar-maid pronounced the word *pomes*) "you were wishing for the other day," she said, still lingering. "I borrowed it from Miss Parkins, over the way."

"Thank you, Susan, 'twas very kind and thoughtful of you," said Onslow, flinging his cap into a corner, and himself into a chair.

There were some flowers in a glass on the chimney-piece, which the pretty bar-maid had placed there with her own hands. "Perhaps," she said to herself, "he'll think the chamber-maid put 'em there, if I don't tell him." So she walked up to the fire-

place, and, arranging them anew, said, "You like moss-roses, don't you, Mr Onslow? I've brought you some nice ones."

"You're a good little girl, Susan, and a great deal kinder than I deserve," he replied, running his hand impatiently through his black curls without looking at the roses.

All this was rather up-hill work for poor Susan;—there was so little encouragement to stay longer, that, with every wish to prolong the conversation, she turned away, and, after announcing her intended departure with two or three little coughs, softly closed the door.

Onslow took up the letter and read it over again; then he opened a desk near, and began to write as follows:—

"My dear Vernon,—Thanks for your renewed and friendly offers of assistance.

"From among all my former associates I selected you as my single confidant, when I placed my foot on the lower step of the social ladder, to the bottom of which folly and ill-fortune had hurled me. Of all, you were the only one who, I felt, could appreciate my motives, when, after enlisting as the only alternative of absolute want, I formed a firm resolve to fulfil all the irksome duties of a soldier,

and to work my way upward uncomplainingly, till I could prove myself able, unaided, to retrieve my position. If I failed in this, I, at least, anticipated the pleasure and pride of knowing that I had done much to expiate my follies, and to assure myself that I possessed more firmness and perseverance than the world I lived in of old would give me credit for.

"But, ah, Vernon! who can boast himself of to-morrow? Already I am half resolved to abandon the path I have followed, sternly enough, these three years. Not because I flinch from the burden I have fastened on myself: I have carried it, let me say, with constancy, with a good heart, and even, perhaps, not without dignity. Use had lightened it, and advancement in the service promised to make it still lighter, till a commission, fairly earned, should restore me outwardly to the rank of a gentleman.

"Why then quit it? you say. Ah, Vernon, thou know'st my old weakness—my besetting infirmity. Already you spy the hem of a female garment in the distance. Even so—my firm resolves have melted, like the wings of Icarus, beneath the glance of a pair of black eyes. Could you but know what I have felt, thrown by chance into frequent contact with one to whom, but for my own folly, I might have aspired without presumption—one who, of all the women I have ever seen, has alone gone deeper than to touch

my fancy—who, proud and high-bred as she is, condescends to recognise my native self beneath the dragoon's jacket, and to show her recognition in but too flattering fashion. By heaven, Vernon! the struggles I have had with a mad desire to throw myself at her feet, tell her who I was and am, and what I feel for her, are such as have taxed my self-restraint to the utmost!

"Knowing me as you do, you can well understand how the feeling of degradation, before but little noticed, has grown almost unbearable. Should the temptation become too strong—should I rashly betray myself—there are two prospects before me, both simply damnable. 'Look you upon this picture, and on this;' the one shows presumption withering beneath a glance—(such an eye she has, Vernon!)—me, poor, proud, snubbed, and crushed back into my corporal's jacket. The other—is it my vanity only that draws this one more flattering to itself?—but, in any case, what a scoundrel must I be to ask the woman I love to share such fortunes as mine, or to stoop and raise me! No, no! thank God I have some of the ancient pride yet, and should forgive myself in neither case.

"But I feel the conflict get perilous; therefore, Vernon, I adjure you, by our ancient alliance, to be ready, on getting notice from me, to put the necessary machinery in motion with the powers that be,

for my release from this painted thraldom. Fear not for me—where there's a will there's a way—the world shall be mine oyster, though not to be opened with a cavalry sabre; and a word from your potent relative at the Horse Guards will again let me loose on it. So never waste advice or remonstrance, but, like a true man, let that word be spoken when I request it. Thine as of old."

This epistle Onslow folded, and addressed to "The Hon. M. Vernon, Ditting Hall, ——shire," and sealed it with a seal-ring he wore on his little finger. Then he put it carefully away, and, lighting a cigar, stretched his spur-clad heels across the fender, and smoked himself into a state sufficiently calm to justify his retiring to bed with a fair prospect of sleeping.

Orelia's head was filled that night with thoughts of the mysterious dragoon. The more she meditated on the incongruity between his manners and position, the more she was puzzled, and the more her curiosity was stimulated. He was like a well-written charade. In his person violent contradictions were reconciled so smoothly, and all seemed so fair and plain, that solution appeared an easy task; yet there he was, day after day, defying her ingenuity as imperturbably

as ever. As curiosity and uncertainty were feelings that this impetuous young lady suffered with extreme impatience, she resolved to endeavour, during the ride of the next morning, to lead the conversation in a direction which might tend to the solution of the riddle.

Accordingly, the next day, when the hour for the riding lesson was at hand, she descended the stairs, her head filled with cunning designs for entrapping Onslow into revealments of his early life and education, and reasons for enlisting in the army; and flattered herself that, by the exercise of these wiles, and a little imaginative skill to connect the scraps of information thus obtained, she might succeed in "plucking out the heart of his mystery."

The horses were at the door, and Rosa was mounted, but in place of the Corporal there stood a huge bulky dragoon, with high shoulders, a round face, and a wide mouth, who stared at her, as he saluted, with eyes about as expressive as his boots.

"Tindal has sent a note," said Bagot, "to say he is sorry that Onslow cannot be spared; but he thinks Sergeant Cumbermare will be found equally serviceable." In fact, Tindal had discovered that some of his young hands were terribly in want of riding-drill, and that nobody but Onslow could administer it.

Orelia bestowed on the unhappy Cumbermare a glance so full of scorn, that Rosa expected to see that warrior wither away and sink down into his boots. Then, putting out her lip, she said, "I shall not ride to-day;" and, sweeping round majestically, she re-entered the house; while Rosa, in order that the Sergeant's feelings might not be injured, set out upon a solitary ride.

CHAPTER XIII.

If Lady Lee had been that exceedingly disagreeable character, a perfect pattern of a woman, so often met with in the pages of romance—so seldom, fortunately, in real life—I need hardly say these portions of her history would never have been chronicled. She had a vast number of charming little womanly failings—would give way to pique, vanity, prejudice—was liable to be influenced by all manner of unreasonable reasons, such as rank high in the feminine code of logic, though they could not stand for a moment against Archbishop Whately—was petulant, sometimes wilful, and perhaps capable of bestowing affection without first inquiring whether the object was deserving of it, being quite as likely to be influenced by her taste as her judgment. So I would warn those readers who, with their tastes depraved by a long course of didactic fiction, expect to find her, perhaps, a model for the Widows of England, that

she has none of those pernicious excellences which would qualify her for the honour. Any of those approved and respectable heroines who so often refrigerate the reader with visions of unattainable merit, and make him shudder at the idea of the possibility of taking such a bundle of virtues to his bosom, would have found her full of blemishes. Dear Lady Lee! like England, with all thy faults I love thee still—neither of you are the worse for a little uncertainty of atmosphere. Yet how should I have been forced to nip and prune thee, and cocker thee up, hadst thou been that responsible being, the heroine of a tale with a moral; but, thank Heaven! mine has none that I know of. Moral! God bless you, sir, I've none to tell! And I'm not sorry for it, either—though I observe that writers, nowadays, think so much of their moral, that, when they have not sufficient leisure or art to embody it, they tack on an essay to the beginning or end of a chapter for fear they should miss their aim—where it looks like a red elbow or horny toe protruding through the finery that clothes the rest of the design. For this reason many devoted novel-readers have begun to taste fiction of late with a mixture of longing and distrust—from the same cause which makes us, for many years previous to adolescence, suspect a latent dose in every spoonful of pleasant insidious raspberry jam.

Lady Lee had sorrowed sincerely for Sir Joseph. She was affectionate by nature; and the baronet had been so dotingly, so reverentially fond of her, and had displayed his fondness in so many acts of generosity and thoughtfulness, that she must have been both hard-hearted and ungrateful to have speedily forgotten him, whereas she was far from being either.

But since her marriage she had undergone a great change—superficially at least. She no longer showed the bright enthusiasm, the repressed hopefulness, that had characterised her of yore. Jumping too quickly, as ladies sometimes do, at a conclusion, she had long ago settled it in her own mind that, having failed to realise in her husband the hero of her imagination, that ideal personage must be an absurd nonentity, to be banished for ever from the precincts of her thoughts. In her early widowhood she mourned for Sir Joseph in a calm religious way, and took to going to church many times a-week, bought up all the sermons that she saw advertised for publication (doing horrible violence to her taste by persisting in perusing them), and became a Lady Bountiful to the villagers. Then she dropped down gently from religion to science, and studied chemistry, geology, and botany, though none very

deeply;—shuddered over the *Vestiges of Creation*, revered Hugh Miller, and pretended to admire Doctor Paley, whose *Natural Theology* she found entirely convincing on points of which she had never entertained any doubt. In fact, she knew quite as much about science as, some people think, a woman need or ought—enough to give her a new interest in the world she lived in, and to enable her to talk agreeably, though superficially, on the subjects of her studies. She didn't think much for herself on these subjects—few women do, perhaps; and when they do, they had better have let it alone in nine cases out of ten—(no offence, ladies!)—but she was quite capable of appreciating and appropriating the best thoughts of others. Thus she had gone on accumulating ideas and knowledge, which gave solidity to her more exclusively feminine accomplishments, and had qualified herself for being eminently companionable. There was something extremely piquant in hearing the same voice that had just charmed you with the brilliant delivery of a difficult song, or the exquisite grace of a simple one, discourse most excellent music on the Old Red Sandstone and primary formations. But shortly before the opening of our story she had abated in zeal for these matters; she had become rather indolent, and given to speculate on why she was born, and what was her business in

this world, and the like improving themes, customary with dissatisfied philosophers. If I might venture to guess at the cause of this dissatisfaction, I pronounce it to be the emptiness of her heart. All sorts of loving capabilities, fit to make an inexhaustible paradise for a lover worthy of them, were running to waste, and caused her daily amusements to sound hollow to the ear of her fancy.

But it must have been her own fault, you will say, when I tell you she had had lovers enough since Sir Joseph's death. There was Sir Christopher Clumber, also a baronet and a widower, who, keeping his eye on her, and suffering a decent time to elapse before he made his proposals, then urged them in a calm, dogged, confident way, that seemed to defy even the bare idea of refusal;—meeting with which, he could never be persuaded of her being in earnest in her rejection of him, but persisted for many years in considering it a mistake. Then there was an ancient *roué* of a nobleman, who saw her accidentally as he passed through Doddington, and whose capacity for admiration, at least, still survived —this lover lived three weeks at the hotel, and procured an introduction, and two or three interviews with her ladyship, after the last of which he suddenly ordered post-horses and departed, notwithstanding he was threatened with gout. And there

was a rich manufacturer of the neighbourhood, who resolved to indemnify himself for the sacrifices he had so long offered up on the altar of trade by a little domestic felicity with the woman of his choice; but the choice falling, unfortunately for him, on Lady Lee, who wouldn't listen to him, he thenceforth bestowed his undivided energies on the less romantic pursuit that had hitherto engrossed them, and grew disgustingly rich.

These rude attempts upon her heart, instead of making the task of opening it any easier, only damaged the lock. She became almost misanthropic —was prepared to think ill of mankind in general, like a female Timon, and could be severely epigrammatic on matrimony. She began to fancy herself *blasée*, and spoke of herself to Orelia and Rosa as if she were an old and experienced matron, who had discovered that all was vanity and vexation of spirit; and, while unconsciously brimful of romance and sentiment, she affected to look on life with as little sense of its poetry as a Free-Trader. She languidly continued her dabblings in science—read a good deal in general literature, under the guidance of a discriminating friend who shall appear presently—and took charge of Julius's education, which was accordingly conducted after a desultory fashion, moral and intellectual; for she sometimes let him have his

head, sometimes suddenly took him up short in the curb, in a way that, joined to the spoiling he got from the other two, might have gone far to ruin him, had he not been a little fellow of an extremely good and generous temper.

And here, by the by, this mention of the other two reminds me that I have a couple of young ladies in the narrative whose presence is as yet unaccounted for; and as critics are often a sort of people who would by no means permit young females, however charming, to stray unprotected, and without character and pedigree duly attested, about the precincts of a story, we will have a little explanation on that head forthwith, Mr Critic.

Orelia Payne had been a great friend of Lady Lee's, in the latter's maiden days, and their acquaintance chanced in this way: Near the parsonage-house of Mr Broome, Hester's father, stood an ornamented cottage, with very pretty grounds surrounding it. It had been the property of a majestic old lady, who dwelt therein in great state; and after the old lady's death, it continued to be kept in good preservation.

To the garden and conservatory, both well filled, Hester, who had taken it into her head to study botany, frequently went, during the time the house was unoccupied after the old lady's decease. Ru-

mours there were of a new possessor, and of orders being sent to keep everything in trim; but no occupant arrived for some time, and Hester attained such supremacy that no alteration was made in any of the horticultural arrangements without her concurrence.

About a year after the death of the majestic old lady, a young lady, her god-daughter and heiress—selected for those united honours, perhaps, because she was a majestic young lady—came to live at the cottage. Hester, ignorant of the arrival of the new possessor, continued her visits, greatly to the improvement and instruction of the head-gardener; for she knew more about botany than he, though his salary was about double that of some curates. When Orelia (for she was the new possessor) heard from him that a young lady who understood plants particular well was in the habit of coming there, she experienced a desire similar to that which George III. felt when he heard that Doctor Johnson was a frequent visitor to the royal library, and, like that monarch, gave orders that she might be apprised of the next advent of the illustrious stranger.

So Hester, poking about among some newly-arrived orchids, heard a rustling of female garments behind her, and turning, found herself face to face with Orelia. The latter held a book open in her hand, and on her head was a straw hat, such as

young ladies do not often appear in beyond the precincts of their own private territories—so that Hester had no difficulty in guessing that the handsome girl, with her eye and face of the falcon type, and a figure straight and elastic as steel,—who looked twenty, though only seventeen,—was a resident in the house, and might perhaps think her an intruder. No fear of that, however. Orelia read in Hester's beautiful, high-bred face, and large, soft-shadowed, hazel eyes, the promise of what she principally wanted to make her comfortable and happy in her new abode—viz., a companion. Walking straight towards her, and unheeding the overthrow of a couple of exotics, pots and all, which stood in her line of march, she said, in a steady tone, as if to an old acquaintance whom she had long expected, "I'm so glad you're come. I've been waiting in for you all the morning."

In about a week from this, they were all but inseparable. Orelia's only other companion was an elderly governess, who never attempted to dispute her will, and therefore, like some other docile rulers whom the world has seen, would seem to have enjoyed a title rather at variance with facts. On Saturdays her father, a rich banker (not, however, of the firm of Smith, *Payne*, and Smith), used to come down to spend Sunday with her, going back on Monday morning. If by any chance the two girls

didn't meet early in the morning, you would be pretty sure, if you happened to be traversing the road between the parsonage and Orelia's cottage, either to meet Hester posting to the latter, or Orelia rushing in the direction of the former; and sometimes, actuated by this common impulse, they met half-way between the two mansions. They read the same books, and talked them over together; they told each other their thoughts—(luckily they had some to tell, which is not invariably the case on these occasions, as I am informed)—in fact, they were fast friends. And, though ascetic and malevolent old bachelors (fellows who have been jilted, probably, and have a spite against the sex) do say, that female friendships springing up thus rapidly, and cemented with passages from Byron, Moore, and Madame de Staël, are sometimes rather fanciful than sincere, and are apt to fall to decay with marvellous celerity, yet this was an honourable instance of the stability of female alliances; it continued during the period of Lady Lee's married life, and, since her widowhood, Orelia had been a frequent visitor at the Heronry.

Her ladyship's acquaintance with Rosa was of more recent date; and as the account of its origin involves the introduction of a new character in our story, we shall discuss it in another chapter.

CHAPTER XIV.

Not very far from the Heronry—perhaps half a mile from the gates—stood the little village of Lanscote. This was not the village described in a former chapter as in view from the windows of the house, but was situated on the hither side of the river. A trim but somewhat steep lane, descending shadily between high banks, led to it. Looking through a long vista of overhanging hawthorn, the wayfarer saw before him, just at the point where a sharp turn would bring him in sight of the village, the white gate of the parsonage. Arriving at this gate, and standing in the cross-road, the view suddenly expanded;—on each side stretched a perspective of four or five miles, while, beyond the parsonage, the prospect was closed by the foliage of trees clothing the steep bank of the farther side of the river.

Here dwelt Josiah Young, curate of Lanscote, and here he had dwelt for two or three years previously.

Some time before the opening of our story, it had occurred to him that the presence of his sister Rosa, who had been, when he last saw her, a merry schoolgirl, but was now grown into a young lady of near eighteen, would agreeably enliven his solitude. He pondered the idea of procuring a visit from her for some time, and at length resolved to broach the project to his housekeeper, Jennifer Greene.

If the Reverend Josiah had possessed the slightest turn for diplomacy, he never would have done anything of the sort, but would have locked the idea securely in his own breast till it was ripe for execution. Jennifer Greene was by no means the sort of housekeeper likely to regard the establishment of young ladies in the household with a favourable eye. She was a widow, about thirty, trim, neat, black-eyed, sharp of look and voice, and as fond of power as Lord John Russell. As she stood on the other side of the breakfast-table, with the tea-caddy in her hand, measuring out, according to custom, the number of spoonfuls required for the Curate's breakfast, he began to feel the impracticability of his project dawning on him. Up to that moment, it had seemed to him a simple, matter-of-fact sort of thing, easy of arrangement, and sure of her concurrence; but now, as, sitting in his easy-chair, he glanced nervously over his book at her closed lips—firmly closed as they

always were, as if to keep in a retort struggling to burst out before it was required—he really wanted words to begin. It suddenly seemed to him a favour he had no right to expect, and he felt that Jennifer would be justified in the outburst that would be sure to follow. The Curate was a nervous man. He experienced a sort of guilty sensation, as he often did when preferring requests to the despotic Jennifer—such as he had felt lately when he thought of asking her to change his dinner-hour to a more convenient one, but couldn't make up his mind to it. He half resolved to express himself on the present subject in a note, which he could leave behind, after departing on feigned urgent business for a day or two. While he was thus considering, the housekeeper, having finished measuring the tea, put the caddy on the table.

"You couldn't make it convenient to spend the day somewhere to-morrow, Mr Young?"

"To-morrow, Mrs Greene. Why so?"

"I want," said the housekeeper, "to clean up the house. This carpet must come up, and—"

"Wouldn't brushing it do?" suggested the Curate, glancing at the lanes of books, which, having overflowed the pair of bookcases that stood in two niches of the apartment, were now meandering in labyrinthine confusion over the floor—ponderous tomes; ancient volumes, solidly bound and solidly written;

and modern works, lighter in structure, certainly, on the outside at least—all wandering, side by side, over chairs, tables, and window-seats; for the Curate was an insatiate and insatiable reader. "Wouldn't brushing it do?"

"No, it wouldn't, sir," said Jennifer, shortly. "There's heaps of dust" (pretending to cough) "in this carpet, only it's kept down by the books. There's nothing so bad as books for hoarding the dust; and wherever there's dust there's spiders — and where there's spiders there's cobwebs" (glancing sternly at a thread of gossamer swaying from the ceiling, that would have escaped a less vigilant eye, as she propounded this entomological axiom). "And there's the spare bedroom's getting quite mouldy—if it isn't aired, I wouldn't be the next person to sleep in it—not for fifty pound—"

"We must see to that," said the Curate, "for it may be wanted."

"Sir?" said Jennifer, inquiringly.

"I was thinking," said the Curate, stammering with nervousness, "I was thinking—that is—I haven't seen my sister for a long time, Mrs Greene."

"Well, sir?" said Mrs Greene.

"And—and—I've been thinking of asking her to come and see me; and of course she'd have to sleep in the spare bedroom, Mrs Greene."

Jennifer's side was towards him, and, as she tossed up her head now, her sharp eyes glanced sideways on his face, so that the right one looked at him across the point of her nose.

"Oh, sir," said Jennifer. "Very good, sir!"

That was all. The Curate did not know how she looked as she departed, for he did not dare to glance at her; but he remarked that her step was rather quick, and the door made a good deal of noise in closing.

"Dear me," said he, drawing his chair to the table, and pouring out the tea, "I feel quite relieved. Really it is very good of Mrs Greene to be so accommodating."

The Curate went on devouring his book and his toast unsuspectingly in this deceitful calm. He had finished a chapter of the former, and was buttering a second round of the latter, when the door was again opened, and Jennifer entered.

"There, sir," said she, flinging down on the table a bunch of keys—"there, sir, you'll find everything correct to the last pin."

"Mrs Greene!" said the astonished Curate; "dear me, what's the matter?"

"Three years come June I've lived here," continued Jennifer, gazing at a point in the wall over the Curate's head, and keeping time to her words

with her foot on the floor, "and if anybody can say there's been so much as a pin wasted, let 'em say it. I've toiled and moiled, high and low, up stairs and down, like any slave—I've been a good servant to you, sir."

"Excellent, my dear Mrs Greene!" said the Curate, who suddenly began to believe Jennifer the pink and pattern of all housekeepers, and himself an ingrate and a tyrant—"invaluable, Mrs Greene—who says otherwise?"

"I've been a good servant to you, sir," continued Jennifer, "and would have so been, as was my duty and pleasure, but for spies being set over me."

"Spies!" said Mr Young; "bless me, who talked of spies?"

"Yes, spies!" continued Jennifer, pressing her hands very tightly on her bosom, and nodding at the wall, with inflated nostrils. "They may be called sisters, or they may be called visitors, but there's only one name for them. And my mind's made up."

"But, my dear Mrs Greene! surely it's very natural that I should wish to see my sister," said the Reverend Josiah, apologetically, "and she needn't interfere with you—she wouldn't wish to, I'm sure."

"Wouldn't she! Oh, sir, you may think so, perhaps, in the innocence of your heart, but you don't

know 'em. It is one thing to look after gentlemen, and another thing to be looked after by ladies. I haven't refused the many good situations I might have had, to be overlooked now—and so, sir, as I said, my mind's made up, and—and"—(here a cloudiness about the eyes betokened a coming shower, while the tapping on the floor was louder than ever) —"and I hope you'll get somebody to" (sob, sob)— "please, please you" (sniff, sniff)—"better than me."

Mr Young sighed, and was troubled. Perhaps (he thought) he had been very wrong to speak about it. Housekeepers had their feelings and points of honour like other folks, and were entitled to have them indulged. The idea of her really going away, and leaving him to look out for a fresh housekeeper, who didn't know his ways, and would give him no end of trouble, was not to be entertained for a moment—so he decided to relinquish his project, and go home for a week instead; and, applying himself to soothe the wounded prejudices of Jennifer, prevailed upon her, as a great favour, to resume the seals of office, in consideration of his submission.

We are all of us henpecked—husbands by their wives, bachelors by housekeepers, washerwomen, and other females with whom they come in contact: none of us can plume ourselves upon the intact perfection of our plumage, for the marks of the pecker are over

us all; and the Reverend Josiah Young, with his neck quite denuded, and his tail-feathers sorely bedragled, cowered like a plucked capon in the presence of his housekeeper, who began to wear a comb and crow like a cock.

Immediately after his defeat, the Reverend Josiah, hastily concluding a breakfast for which he had no appetite left, lit his pipe and went out into his garden.

Every flower there was a personal friend of his,—he knew, not only the history of its race, but the biography of the individual. To this lonely, silent man the woods and lanes and fields opened their hearts, and became great storehouses of interest.—Primroses spoke to him when they came out in the spring; harebells chimed an audible music; the moss and the heath and the fern disclosed to him their hidden virtues. The tinted ornaments of the earth were not more lavish of their sweetness to the roving bee, than to this plain, black-coated, white-cravated Curate.

I say plain, for, open as was the Curate's soul to forms of grace and sounds of harmony, his person was not remarkable for beauty—he was rather plain than otherwise, with light, very light hair and eyebrows, and his pale pink complexion inclined to run into small excrescences about the nose, cheeks, and chin. Ah! to think that the fairest minds sometimes elude the observer behind warts and pimples! Had I the

management of the world, the Curate should have a skin of satin, and a halo like an angel.

So he walked carefully through the paths of his little garden, stooping to take each flower between his two first fingers, and upturn its face to his, while the sun, glancing through his light frizzly hair, made it look like hay. And, sometimes espying a caterpillar, earwig, or other bandit and free companion, mutilating his favourites, he would pour on the felonious insect clouds of tobacco smoke till it became insensible, and, carefully transferring it in a state of coma to a leaf, would convey it beyond the boundary of his garden. A paddock across the road was the convict establishment, and was quite a preserve of banished vermin and reptiles.

He was gazing fondly on the countenance of a blue anemone near the gate, when a very gentle tap or poke on the shoulder from the point of a parasol caused him to start and turn round,—Lady Lee smiled at him over the palisades, and the image of the anemone faded from his mind. With his pale pinkness of complexion become celestial rosy red (for, like all nervous, studious men, the Curate had a sad trick of blushing), he hastened to open the gate, and she and Julius entered, while the white pointer crouched outside in the sun.

"How I envy you your interest in your flowers! If I could read the book of the earth like you, I would be content to turn a sort of a philosophic nun, and consecrate myself to its worship," said her ladyship.

"So would men lose one of *their* objects of worship," said the Curate, gallantly; but he spoiled the compliment by hesitating in its delivery.

"Your interest seems always so fresh," she continued, not heeding his speech. "You seem to turn to each object as unweariedly as if it were your first glance—the bloom is renewed for you, while I—"

"While you find novelty in perpetual diversity," said the Curate. "It shows your mind to be many-sided, your sympathies wide."

"No," said Lady Lee, dropping on the stone seat at the gate, and poking absently in the flower-bed with the point of her parasol; "it shows me fickle, unstable, unsatisfied. I am occupied for the time; but in the intervals I sit listlessly, and hear the earth creaking wearily on its axle."

The Curate gazed at her with wonderful sympathy; he absolutely winked with earnestness. "Ah," he said, "could I but have the happiness of knowing how to fill up these chinks of fancied weariness—for fancied it must be, since to be wearied of yourself seems an impossibility" (this he muttered to himself) —"I could be content indeed."

"And have you not done great things for me?" said she. "I don't know any one to whom I owe so much. It is you who have directed my studies and widened my views. Before, I was a desultory devourer of books, reading much but meditating little; walking through the world like a peasant girl at a fair, wondering and ignorant. You have led me within the portals of those fairy lands of science where you walk at your ease, and where I might follow, but for an indolence and apathy which I have spirit enough to regret but not to conquer."

"Perhaps I could wish you a little more zealous in your pursuit of knowledge," rejoined the Curate; "your powers of observing and judging are too rare to be allowed to rust; and yet I don't know whether there isn't something more engaging to the fancy in your present mode of straying only among the flowers and avoiding the dust of these pursuits. To saunter is more feminine and graceful than to plod."

"Flatterer!" said her ladyship, shaking her parasol at him: "you certainly have the art of putting me in a better humour with myself; whether by your words or example, I don't know. Bless me, Juley," she said, jumping up from the bench and looking at her watch, "we must be off. We are going to visit some people in the village, Juley and I." One would no longer have known her bright face for the

clouded listless one of a moment before — the remembrance of her weariness had vanished. But the Curate was not so versatile, and he stuck to his subject.

"I was in hopes," said he, "that I should shortly have given you a new subject of interest—my sister Rosa, of whom you have heard me speak—but I am vexed to find she can't come to me."

"And why not?" asked Lady Lee.

The Curate was rather ashamed to confess the obstacle, but, by skilful cross-examination, her ladyship elicited that Jennifer was the opposing party.

"Wretched woman!" said Lady Lee to herself, apostrophising the offending Jennifer; but presently a thought seemed to strike her. "What is Rosa's address?" inquired she; "I must write to her, and say how sorry I am she can't come; and so we may become acquainted, at least on paper." And having obtained the address, she bid the Curate good morning, smiling, and departed.

Standing on tiptoe, his hands grasping the tops of the gate-rails, his neck outstretched into the lane till his chin projected inches and inches out of his white cravat, the Curate watched Lady Lee till she was out of sight. Then, drawing a long breath, he shortened his neck, straightened his body, and sunk upon his heels. He rubbed his heels—he muttered

to himself, smiling—he looked up and laughed aloud, and then, breaking suddenly off, gazed around to see if anybody had overheard him. Presently he laughed again—he bent his body courteously forward as if explaining something—he waved his hand argumentatively—he raised it deprecatingly—he brought the palms together. "He's certainly acting a play," said Jennifer to herself, looking out of the window at him as she dusted the books.

Nothing of the kind, however. He was merely continuing in imagination the conversation he had just terminated with Lady Lee. He was saying brilliant things to her—he was greatly distinguishing himself in the imaginary conference—he was taking that share in it which he would have taken in the real one if he had had a little less bashfulness—a little more presence of mind.

A few days afterwards, he got a note desiring his presence at the Heronry. Before he had well entered the hall, a pair of arms were cast round him—

"I'm come, Josiah," whispered Rosa to her astonished brother, "to stay with Lady Lee, and I'm to visit you every day."

Thus it was that Rosa Young became domiciled at the Heronry, and, henceforth, the Curate's visits there were made on a more familiar footing.

Hitherto his admiration and friendship for Lady

Lee had been of a very respectful kind; and not even her frank and sisterly treatment of him had been able to diminish the awe with which her beauty, refinement, and a certain loftiness that mingled even with her frankness, inspired him. She had been a holiday figure in his imagination, to have contemplated which too often and familiarly would have appeared, to the Curate's mind, a kind of unholy revelry.

But Rosa's presence now formed a connecting link between them. That "things which are familiar with the same thing are familiar with one another," is an axiom as true as any in Euclid. Not that I mean to insinuate, however, that because both the Curate and Lady Lee were in the habit of occasionally kissing Rosa, they ever kissed each other. I should be truly sorry to stain my pages with the chronicling of any such enormity, which would deservedly call down on my devoted head the wrath of all the aged and exemplary female critics in England (old ladies, as I judge from internal evidence, being the authors of four-fifths of the most profound criticisms of the day); and I have quite enough to do, as it is, to avoid treading on the corns of those estimable persons. No, no: all I mean to say is, that Lady Lee, when seeing Rosa skipping round the Curate, putting a neater bow on his white cravat, brushing the dust off his coat, and calling him

Josiah, would sometimes, in a half inadvertent way, call him Josiah also; for, indeed, it was not easy to be ceremonious with him. And the Curate's heart would thereupon give a lively jump of delight, sending his blood leaping not only into his face, but right up to the crown of his head, and filling his soul and his eyes with a wonderful gratitude and complacency; inspiring him, at the same time, with such an ardour to make some return for this delightful familiarity, that he would have been charmed to rush off at a moment's notice to the extremities of the earth to fetch her pocket-handkerchief. But no such sacrifices were required at his hands; and the calling of him by his Christian name grew more frequent, till "Mr Young" was almost banished from the precincts of their conversation; and, when the appellation did creep in, it caused him to feel a kind of mild and sorrowful resentment.

Then, what could be more charming than to sit with them in the spacious library, with its hollow carved ceiling, its deep bay-windows with the diamond panes, its velvet-covered easy-chairs, and shelves filled with books, many of them of his own selection; and there to expound to them some botanical or geological theory or system, or read aloud from some author whom they had hitherto been unacquainted with, either from his being so very ancient

or so very new. And a new and hitherto unsuspected peculiarity began to develop itself in the Curate—he became extremely cunning, and, under pretence of giving brotherly advice to Rosa, would direct all sorts of moral and didactic batteries upon Lady Lee. For the benefit of the latter, too, though under the same pretence, he would advance sentiments and opinions on intimate and confidential subjects, all having remote reference to her ladyship; but whenever she expressed her dissent from any of these, he would immediately abandon them, and shamelessly go over, with the utmost facility, to her side of the question.

He showed a great deal of art, too, in the gradual approaches he made towards calling her Hester. If she had been simply Miss Lee, he would have seen his way clearly enough; for he might first have called her Miss Hester, and then gradually have dropt the formal prefix. Now, to convert Lady Lee into Hester was no such easy process. But Rosa, by her ladyship's own desire, always addressed her by her Christian name; and when she said to her brother, "Josiah, Hester says so and so," the Curate would repeat after her, "Oh, Hester says so and so, does she?" and then would tremulously and furtively glance at her ladyship, to see how she took it; and, finding this pass, as a matter of course, he grew

bolder; and when Rosa said, "Hester and I are going to work," he would say, "Well, if Hester and you are going to work, I'll read to you;" which devices he considered as the climax of human ingenuity and tact.

Instead, too, of any longer keeping the image of Lady Lee under a glass-case, as it were, and only indulging himself occasionally with the contemplation of it, it now began to intrude itself between him and his flowers, to take shape, and ascend in the smoke of his meerschaum—nay, to cause the pages of the very sermon he was writing for delivery on the ensuing Sunday to grow dim and confused beneath the celestial radiance; totally obliterating, perhaps, some eloquent paragraph he had just composed on the vanity of all human affections. And then, waking up, he would wave away the vision impatiently, take a fresh dip of ink, square his elbows resolutely, and write, "Thirdly, my Christian friends, let us consider—" and, sinking back in his chair, the poor Curate would consider nothing more to the purpose than how Lady Lee had looked or spoken when he last saw her. And he carried on with her, while alone in his elbow-chair at the parsonage, more imaginary conversations than ever Walter Savage Landor wrote, and would thirst for the next visit, that this airy eloquence of his might

take actual sound, and receive audible replies. And he used to be so brilliant, so lively, so irresistible, in argument, in these ideal interviews, that he would sometimes, at the conclusion of a real one, wonder why he should depart with a sense of having acquitted himself in a manner so inferior to his thought.

Let no impatient lover, sighing like furnace, and burning like one, taking no note of time, and wishing it annihilated till the moment shall come to give him all he wishes—let none such imagine that the Curate's passion made him anxious or unhappy. Study and reading and philosophy had made his life so full before, that no empty hours were left wherein to originate those ardent hopes that give a man no peace till they are smothered in possession. So far as mere beauty affected him, the Curate might have been chaplain to a seraglio, without ever falling in love with the fairest Georgian of them all. He would have simply admired her, as he did one of those gorgeous beetles or painted butterflies with which his hat and pockets overflowed after a morning walk. He would never have gone an inch out of his way to look for an object of worship. But how could he help falling in love, poor unsuspicious Josiah, when love lay directly in his accustomed paths? And never did captive dwell more contentedly at the bottom of his pitfall. A new and bright element

had been introduced into a busy, peaceful life, lending it a fresh charm, but producing no violent displacement of the habitual trains of thought. And the Curate was so happy, that, if these pleasant relations had continued just as they were, without growing either more or less intimate, he could have passed on thus, even to old age, without a murmur. And his life, thus gently rippled, was flowing on shadily and pleasantly, when its placid surface was further broken by the reappearance of an old acquaintance of his (though a new one to the reader), as occurred in the following manner.

CHAPTER XV.

It was a wet evening—cold, though in June, and more comfortless than a stormy winter twilight, when the idea of the cheerful fire illuminating the inner world of home is pleasant to the drenched and shivering victim of weather. The Curate was returning from a visit to an invalid in the village; his black trousers, saturated with the moisture of the long rank herbage, mostly fern and dock-leaves, that fringed the lane, stuck closely as gaiters to his ankles, while his umbrella rattled again with the showers of drops it shook down in its passage underneath the hawthorn bushes. There was a little pool in the latch of the garden-gate as he put his forefinger in it: the white palings gleamed wetly in the gloom; the garden itself was drenched and dismal; and the window of his sitting-room, which, in a winter's evening, glowed out on his returning figure like the portal of a brighter world, looked black and sullen as

a cave. "I'll have a fire," said the Curate, "if Mrs Greene has no objection; and I'll have some tea; and I'll finish the other volume of that capital book." The Curate was a great sensualist in his way.

Forgetting to scrape his shoes before entering, and sticking his wet umbrella upright against the wall, from the ferrule of which forthwith meandered a dark sluggish stream along the passage (both high crimes and misdemeanours in the Jenniferian code), he rubbed up his hair, and entered his sitting-room. He was groping his way to the bell, to order a fire to be lit, when he saw a tall dark figure standing in the shadow of the window-curtains. The Curate at first thought it an optical delusion, and waved his hand towards it, in order to dispel the vision; but his fingers encountered the lapel of a veritable coat. "A robber!" thought the Curate, and instantly grappled the intruder. "Who are you, sir? and what are you doing in my house?" queries which the mysterious person responded to by grappling him in return, and forcibly causing him to seat himself in his easy-chair. The Curate, however, still resisted valiantly, till his antagonist, who had been struggling, not only with him, but with a laugh that threatened to become uproarious, suddenly quitted his hold, giving hearty vent to his merriment.

"I should know that voice," said the Curate;

"who on earth is it?" The sound had conjured up a vision of the Curate's youth.

Just then Mrs Greene entered with the candles. The light showed the figure of a tall man in undress cavalry uniform, with a handsome face and a light mustache, beneath which his teeth gleamed whitely in his mirth. He held out his hand to the Curate. "The same old boy," said he, "as ever—the same old Josey."

The Curate, with his head thrust inquiringly forward, his mouth open, stared in his face, and dubiously took his hand. "Not Fane," he said—"not Durham Fane?" The other nodded, smiling.

The Curate, instantly tightening the grip of his right hand, seized Fane's arm above the elbow with his left, and worked at him as if the house had sprung a leak, and his visitor were the pump on which he depended for safety.

"Not forgotten, Durham!—never forgotten in all the long years since we were companions!—always remembered as my earliest friend. I may almost say my only one; for I have never had one of the kind since. And where have you come from?—and what are you doing with that mustache?—and how did you find me out? Have you had any dinner?"

"Ha, ha!—the same muddle-headed old boy as ever, with his ideas, called suddenly in from wool-

gathering, pouring forth in breathless disorder," said Fane. "First, Josey, I come from Doddington, where my troop is quartered at present. I had been out for an afternoon ride, when, struck by the appearance of your parsonage, I asked a girl who was passing whose it was?—more for the sake of speaking to the article, who was pretty, Josey, than because I cared to know. 'The Reverend Josiah Young?'—the name electrified me—it was threatening rain; so I tied my horse to the gate (from whence he has since been transferred to the stable) and entered. A glance round the room, and at the backs of the books, would have assured me who was the inhabitant, even without the autograph on the fly-leaves. Burton—Gilbert White—Camden—Evelyn—Jeremy Taylor—Kenelm Digby—the antiquated brotherhood would have been sorely incomplete without old Josey Young, the most old-fashioned of the fraternity, to consort with them. So I sat here patiently, while the rains descended and the winds came, waiting till you should make yourself manifest."

"Not altered, Fane, in speech or spirit," said the Curate smiling—"the same irreverent fun on the surface—the same strong sense and kindliness, doubtless, underneath. We'll have such a glorious evening!—for you won't leave me, I'm sure. Mrs Greene!

Mrs Greene!" (Enter Jennifer.) "My friend here is going to stay the evening—he has had no dinner—couldn't you, that is, would it trouble you much to—a beefsteak, you know, or something of that sort, and some of your excellent mashed potatoes—and a bottle of beer—and I'll just have my tea at the same time."

The countenance of Jennifer was gloomy in the extreme; under-done steak and half-mashed potatoes were written thereon very legibly, to the despairing glance of the Curate, who knew that she didn't like to be put out of her way by *impromptu* visitors. Fane stepped forward.

"Excellent Miss Greene," he said, "don't mind what my hospitable friend says. Some bread and butter, cut by your own fair hands—some tea, such as you administer to him—are all I shall trouble you for. I know, my pretty Miss Greene, what a bachelor's household is."

Mrs Greene's feelings were touched—she liked being called Miss Greene, because it made her think she looked young. She liked the politeness of the handsome officer—she liked his consideration for a bachelor's housekeeping, while she felt a pride in her own resources. She smiled and curtsied pleasantly as she withdrew. Fane sent a shot after her.

"What a handsome housekeeper you've got, Josey. What does the bishop say, you sly dog?"

"Is Mrs Greene handsome?" said Josiah. "I really never noticed her looks."

Fane laughed. "Now, if anybody but you had said that," said he, clapping the Curate on the shoulder, "were he the most venerable of archdeacons, or an archbishop, I should have thought him an arch humbug. But I believe you, Josey. You were always a virtuous old boy, by nature and habit as well as principle; and I'll be sworn you don't even know the colour of your housekeeper's eyes."

"And now answer me, thou naughty varlet," said the Curate, drawing his chair to the fire; "what hast thou been doing these ten years?"

"We soldiers, Josey," replied Fane, "spend our time pretty much as Satan spends his, according to the Book of Job—in passing to and fro on the earth, and walking up and down on it."

"Can't you let Job alone, and answer for yourself?" returned Josiah. "I trust your life only resembles Satan's in a perambulatory point of view. And how does it suit you? Is it what you could wish? Have you read much?—you used to be a great reader? Have you seen a great deal of the world? Has it prospered with you?"

"Why, yes," said Fane; "in the ordinary sense I have been prosperous. Health—promotion rapid

enough—pleasant, though seldom quite congenial, associates—a stirring Indian campaign, out of which I came sound, wind and limb—and, for the rest, a soldiering, sporting, love-making life, with snatches of better things. Such has been the tenor of my course. Judge you of its congeniality."

"Not satisfactory, Durham—not what I had prefigured for you. Though, as a boy, you were impetuous, impatient, impulsive "——

"In fact, everything that was impish," said Fane.

"Yet I knew there was ballast enough to steady the vessel. But I fear the good ship has been drifting aimlessly."

"Too true," said Fane—"too true. But my prospects have changed. Three years ago, I was serving in India, exemplifying how happy the soldier is who lives on his pay, when I unexpectedly received a communication from my mother's eldest brother. This old gentleman had never forgiven my mother for marrying my father, a poor subaltern, nor exchanged word or letter with her to the day of her death. I had consequently nothing to expect from him, especially as he had adopted my cousin, Langley Levitt, and was bringing him up as his heir. But Langley, by some acts of disobedience and extravagance, had mortally offended him, and was cast adrift without a penny. My uncle now offered me the

vacant place in his affections, and proposed an immediate exchange to a regiment at home. 'Twas a grand offer for such a poor devil as me. I was sick of India, and gladly consented. The old gentleman behaved very liberally—got me an exchange to a cavalry regiment, and gives me a handsome allowance. So here I do now walk before thee, Josey, captain of dragoons, and heir-apparent to some thousands per annum, on condition of good behaviour."

"I'm delighted at your good fortune, Durham," said the Curate, getting up to pat his friend on the shoulder. "But the poor cousin—what became of him?"

"Nobody knows," replied Fane. "I have caused diligent inquiry to be made for him—secretly, for my uncle won't hear his name mentioned—but without success. From all I can hear, he is chargeable with nothing worse than imprudence, though my uncle did once hint at something of a darker nature. I believe he was a general favourite; but I never saw him."

"Poor fellow!" said the sympathetic Curate. "You must find him, Durham, and take care of him. But has this change of life been for the better? Has your prosperity brought any clear prospect of worthy occupation with it?"

"Was ever such an atrocious kill-joy!—as if it were not enough occupation for an unfortunate men-

dicant like me to revel in the glories of his new position, and go pleasantly to the devil. But no, Josey; my conscience has smitten me for leading such a useless life, and I said so to my uncle. I told him I had looked on long enough at the world, and wished to play a part in it. 'You want to leave dragooning?' said he. 'I do,' said I. 'Marry,' said he, in his usual laconic fashion. 'Whom?' asked I. 'Anybody that's respectable,' was the avuncular rejoinder. 'What atrocious hypocrisy!' thought I; 'I'll expose it immediately.' 'What d'ye think, sir, of Miss Podder?' I said—'pretty, agreeable, and with the prospect of a grand cotton concern as her heritage.' 'Rascal!' thundered my uncle, going as near the verge of apoplexy as an elderly gentleman with safety can—'how dare you mention the infernal cotton-spinning name?' 'Miss Standish,' I suggested, —'good breed—regular Church-and-State family.' 'She hasn't a second idea,' said my uncle, 'and I wouldn't have you marry a fool, Durham.' 'The only other eligible person I can think of,' said I, 'is our neighbour, Miss Kindersley.' 'Would you marry a death's-head?' thundered my relative (and the lady is somewhat gaunt and grim, Josey), 'or do you think I wish to see my niece-in-law grin at me?' The upshot was, that as nothing was to be found near home, I was to try my fortune elsewhere.

Married or not, at the end of a year I exchange life military for life bucolic; but I hardly dare show my nose at home without a wife. Do you know anybody, Josey, that would suit me?"

Why did the Curate redden at the question? Was it that he did know somebody to the purpose? And if so, why not name her? Poor Josiah! a spark of jealousy shot sharply along that simple honest heart, as he thought how well Durham Fane would match with Lady Lee.

Before he had time to grapple with the thought, or to reply, a rattling as of plates, knives, and forks in the passage was heard; and presently a savoury odour preceded Jennifer into the room. A tender steak, done to a turn, a well-made omelet, and a little pyramid of mashed potatoes, of a charming shade of brown, appeared on the snow-white cloth, with a bottle of beer standing sentinel over the whole. The Curate's heart was filled with gratitude to Jennifer.

"Bad policy, Miss Greene," said Fane, drawing a chair toward the well-spread tray, "to make my dinner so inviting. I shall be coming too often."

"Really, Durham, I don't know what spell you've cast over Mrs Greene," said Josiah, as she retired simpering primly. "She is really in a charming humour."

It did the Curate good to mark the affectionate ardour with which Fane threw himself on the steak. He hovered round his guest, plying him with pepper, ketchup, a browner portion of potato—uncorked his beer and poured it foaming creamily into the tumbler—drew the loaf and butter more within his reach — put a fire-screen before him, and then, somewhat inconsistently, poked up the fire; after which, he sat down opposite him, smiling in the intervals of sipping his tea.

"And how has the time passed with you, Josey?" inquired Fane, looking up from his plate; "doubtless, as of yore, in a state of dreamy activity. I always considered yours the most wonderful case of somnambulism ever known. You eat, drink, and walk about like other men, while your mind dwells for ever in pleasant dream-lands. I would lay a wager that you do not now see me in my true light, as a very ordinary mortal dropt in unexpectedly on an old friend, but as an Orestes brought by good spirits to rejoin his Pylades. Life and its incidents were always to you, in reality, what they are to other men only in the illusions of memory or of hope. And I would lay another wager, Josey, that if thou shouldst get thee a wife, she, to ordinary eyes a mere chronicler of small beer, and a mender of cotton stockings, will be, in yours, a peerless and perfect dame,

more than half angel, even though she should waddle before thee with no more waist than a soda-water bottle, and with chins all the way down to her stomacher."

"Do you think I have that faculty?" said the Curate, thoughtfully. "Why, it never struck me—perhaps I have, though—perhaps I have. But I don't remember ever forming a very lofty opinion, such as you mention, of any woman, except one—and she deserves it. Anybody would say so. You will say so yourself when you see her."

"No, Josey, no. I lack the vision and the faculty divine. I am as much over-critical as you are the reverse; and it has enabled me to walk scathless through the hosts of sirens and Circes that beset a man in the earlier stages of his pilgrimage. Why, most reverend and simple Josey, you, with one half my temptations, would have been hopelessly wedded years since to some remorseless female, who, with no more sympathy with your pursuits than my horse, would have invaded your sacred leisure and beloved ease at the head of a troop of imps, whom you would secretly have hated all the worse because you believed yourself their father. And for this lady without peer that you speak of—why, 'tis ten to one, Josey, that I find her some dowdy, or perchance some stupid lay figure which your warm imagination has"—

"Durham!" said the Curate, seriously—"Durham!"

"Why, Josey, a thousand pardons," said Fane, looking up and pausing with a piece of steak on his lifted fork. "Why, the old boy looks as grave as a judge—the sort of look you used to assume, Josey, when I played tricks on our revered head-master at the old vicarage school. But I will look at her, Josey, through your spectacles, and, whatever may be my secret thoughts of this piece of Eve's flesh, I will say nought except in praise of her; nay, more, without seeing her, I pronounce her"—

"Say nothing till you have seen her, Durham," interposed the Curate, "and then say just what you honestly think."

"But you have roused my curiosity, Josey. Who or what is she? What is her name among men?"

"She is called Lady Lee," said the Curate; "and her christian name is Hester."

"Lady Lee!" repeated Fane—"then she is married, eh! and you are admiring your neighbour's wife, most virtuous Josey?"

"No," said the Curate; "she's a widow."

"A widow!" cried Fane. "Why, there you have shivered to pieces at a word all the high imaginations with which I was labouring to come up to your description. There are two sorts of widows—

one, fat, contented, red-faced, looking out for prey among mankind with the calmness of a proficient in the art of man-stealing—the other, wizened, sharp-nosed, querulous, and mighty prolific, as a train of ugly little copies of the dear departed bear witness. Which does her ladyship belong to, Josey?"

"I'll talk to you on the subject when you're in a better frame of mind," said the Curate.

"But, seriously now, Josey, and in sober truth, would there not be something truly formidable in the idea of marrying a widow? To step, not merely into a dead man's shoes, but to put your head in his very nightcap—to have a ghost for a rival—to have base comparisons drawn between yourself and an apparition—to find that her taste inclines towards dark men (the complexion of the deceased having been of a fine deep bronze, while yours is of angelic fairness)—to know that, when you keep her waiting for dinner, or venture to be drowsy when she wants you to be lively, she is thinking of a dear first husband who never committed these crimes. Ah, Josey, do not all these sentiment-defying considerations lurk within the close-crimped circle of a widow's cap?"

While delivering these remarks, Fane was too busy with his knife and fork to observe that they caused the Curate to fidget nervously in his chair.

At the conclusion of them the latter hastened to change the subject, taking advantage of the allusion Fane had made to their school-days to talk of those vanished times with wonderful zest and glee.

At length, after prolonged and youth-restoring review of past times, Fane rose, looking at his watch. "Josey, I must be off."

"Not at all," said the Curate, starting hastily from his chair; "you must stay here to-night. Don't you hear the rain?"

"But 'twill put you out of your way," urged Fane.

"Not in the least—not in the least," said the hospitable Curate. He had been revolving in his mind the chances of Jennifer permitting the sanctuary of the spare room to be profaned, and had resolved not to run the risk of giving her a distaste for Fane at this, his first visit, by taxing her amiability too much, as that might render his future ones unpleasant. Therefore the Curate had arranged that Fane should occupy his own bed, that he should himself sleep on the sofa, and that Mrs Greene need not know anything about it.

So when they had talked their fill, the Curate took a candle to show him the way. But first they went out to the stable, where Fane, with his own hands, groomed his charger, fed him (for Josiah, though he had no horse of his own, was always pre-

pared to entertain the steeds upon which his brother clergymen came to visit him), and littered him down, Josiah holding the candle. Then they proceeded up-stairs, at the top of which Josiah halted, and cautioning his friend to step lightly that he might not awake Mrs Greene, whose door he would pass, whispered "Good night," and, watching him disappear and shut the door of the chamber, descended softly to his sitting-room, where, taking off his coat and shoes, he slumbered peacefully on the sofa, with his best surplice and a green baize table-cloth for bedclothes.

CHAPTER XVI.

When Jennifer entered the next morning, to glance her sharp eyes round the sitting-room and direct the labours of the housemaid (a young villager, whom she kept in a state of complete subjection), she was startled at seeing her master extended on the sofa, slumbering, as aforesaid, peacefully beneath the surplice and the table-cloth—for the Curate, rendered restless by the many thoughts which the presence of his friend had conjured up, lay tossing long after midnight, and had failed to wake so early as he designed in order to evade detection. Jennifer drew herself up and looked at him with austere surprise; but presently guessing the true state of the case, she turned to her young assistant, who stood behind her with broom and duster, and commanded her to go softly into the Curate's bed-room and bring her word who was sleeping there. Presently the maid returned, saying it was the strange officer, and

Jennifer's features relaxed into a stern smile as she thought of the supremacy she had established over the Curate, driving him to adopt such devices in his own house Sweet is the evidence of our own power—far sweeter to natures such as Jennifer's than proofs of affection. And, sending the maid elsewhere, she closed the door softly, and went away.

But even that soft closing of the door roused the Curate. He opened his eyes, looked for a moment wonderingly about him, and then recalling the event of the evening, he sat up on the sofa, rubbed his eyes, and stole gently out from under the shelter of his ecclesiastical bed-clothes. Congratulating himself on the perfect success of his manœuvre, he arranged the table-cloth on the table, put by his surplice where he had found it, shook and thumped the sofa-cushions to remove the traces of his occupancy, and, throwing his coat and waistcoat across his arm, stole gently out into the passage, intending to finish his toilette in his own room before waking his friend, and to instruct him to feign that he, Fane, had dropt in to breakfast after having slept elsewhere. But these machinations were dissolved into thin air at the sight of Jennifer, who confronted him in the lobby. The Curate started like a guilty thing surprised, stared, and then said feebly, "Good morning, Mrs Greene."

"I'm afraid, sir, you've not slept comfortably;" said Jennifer; "but I must say 'twas your own fault, Mr Young. Wasn't there the spare room for your friend, if you had only let me know?"

The Curate was overpowered by Jennifer's goodness, and murmured something about "not wishing to give her trouble."

"And pray, sir, when did I complain of trouble when I could make you or your friends comfortable?" asked Jennifer, reproachfully. "Would the Captain like tea or coffee for breakfast, sir?—or there's chocolate, if he would prefer it?"

"Anything, anything you like, my good Mrs Greene—my friend's not particular," said the Curate, quite embarrassed with his gratitude, and running hastily up-stairs.

This condescension to meet the Curate's wishes was a great stroke of policy on the part of Jennifer. She felt that it was of no use to strain the reins too tightly without an object, and that an occasional relaxation of them might better answer her ends—for ends, and very definite ones, Jennifer had, even from the first day of her establishment at Lanscote Parsonage. She had soon perceived the Curate to be as helpless, as she phrased it, as a child, in his domestic concerns—and who could manage them better than she? And, having established this fact, she had once

absented herself on a week's leave, for the purpose of letting the Curate feel how necessary she was to his comfort; and, on returning, had the satisfaction of hearing him confess that everything had gone wrong in her absence. Then, was she not good-looking?—was not her family respectable? And if she had lowered herself before, in consequence of reduced circumstances, by marrying a small shipmaster, why, that was all the more reason she should do better next time. And, in fact, the shipmaster having been disposed of, by drowning, some years before, Jennifer, in her innermost heart, cherished the design of supplying his place with the Curate. And what was there, she thought, so unlikely in it? Their relation would be but little altered by such a step—in fact, she should care even better for his interests then than now—and so Jennifer, with the patience of a sharp, calculating, cat-like nature, set herself deliberately to watch for the unsuspecting, unwary Curate.

Excellent was the breakfast to which the Curate and his friend sat smilingly down that morning—so excellent, that Fane could not help eulogising it.

"Why, Josey," he said, "what a precious old sensualist you must have grown since we parted! Not content with bread and toast, you must have hot rolls too—and (shade of Apicius!), as if marmalade were not sufficient, here are two sorts of jam—and this

trout is superb, and so is the coffee—Josey, I must really borrow Mrs Greene for a short time—won't you lend her to me, you clerical gourmand?" And the Curate, submitting cheerfully to the charge of gourmandising (which was, however, quite unmerited, for he did not often get such breakfasts), smiled gratefully on Jennifer, who, in her smartest cap, was pouring out the coffee with an air of prim satisfaction.

"I enjoy this wonderfully," said Fane, as he sat after breakfast on a wooden seat fixed against the hedge that bounded the Curate's garden, having a canopy of lilacs and laburnums, while around were thickly scattered yellow wall-flowers, with a bee feeding on the red heart of each, and humming as it fed, mingled with many a balsam, and stocks purple and white—"I enjoy this wonderfully," said Fane, looking up from a great volume that lay on his lap, and addressing the Curate, who, pipe in mouth, was bending among his flowers;—"more than you, Josey, for this is your daily life, and familiarity with these pleasant sights and sounds and scents must have bred a certain indifference towards them. But hours like these steel in enchantingly in the intervals of a busy or a struggling life, such as mine has mostly been, and as I hope it will be."

"You are mistaken," said the Curate. "You are one of those who love strong contrasts, and can

scarcely appreciate even the peaceful blue of the sky unless it peers in streaks through thunder-clouds. But the key of my taste is pitched lower, and I find in these quiet scenes a daily beauty, as Iago says—(by the by, where did such a villain as Iago come by that delicious phrase, Durham?) And if I did find my pursuits staling by custom, why, a slight fillip, such as the presence of an old friend, suffices to restore their lustre. To-day the garden looks almost gaudy, Durham."

"You're a good simple old boy, Josey," said Fane, "and I've half a mind to envy you. There are two classes in the world who seem to me to come nearer happiness than any others—gardeners and painters. Both are brought into incessant contact with the wonders, the glory, and the variety of nature, and are thus secure against satiety. Both are engaged in a struggle, not with their fellows (which leads to emulations, envyings, and the rest that you wot of, Josey), but with the secrets of the outer world—and both receive sufficient encouragement to lead them onward in infinite search. Lastly, Josey, both find perpetual rewards in the sympathy and pleasure which their success excites in others. And, therefore, could I but discern in myself any artist-power of expression, I would turn my sabre-tasche into a

palette, fill my holsters with camel-hair brushes, and (leaving gardening out of the question, because it would make my back ache, and is, moreover, of the earth, earthy) devote myself to placing on canvass the essence of something now lying unthought of in nature's treasury. Thus might one give the world assurance of a man who could listen to its din without wishing to join in the struggle or the shouting."

"A little momentary enthusiasm, excited by present peaceful enjoyment, Durham," said the Curate, smiling. "You are meant to cast a broad and general glance upon the world, not to peer microscopically into its minuter, though still infinite wonders. Trust me, Durham, you would never learn to hang your morrow's expectations, as I do, on the unfolding of a bud, or the breaking of a germ through the soil."

"Long may you continue to flourish in your paradise," said his friend. "It only wants one thing to complete it—such as I now see coming down the road, sending rays before her, as Dante says of his advancing angel, like the morning star. An Eve, Josey, approaches, in a fringed parasol and straw bonnet—and, by Jove, she's coming in at the gate!"

The Curate, somewhat short-sighted as he was, recognised the celestial apparition before it lifted the latch—he always knew Lady Lee a long way off. In his haste to greet her he made a spring over the

central flower-bed, instead of going round it, and, over-estimating his agility, decapitated two gorgeous tulips. Her ladyship, however, displayed none of this haste, waiting patiently with the open gate in her hand to admit Julius, who had overshot the goal in breathless pursuit of a butterfly.

"I am so glad you have come this morning!" said the Curate (as if his illuminated countenance and eager haste did not sufficiently express this). "I am so glad you have come, for there is an old friend of mine here whom I should like you to know."

To say the truth, Lady Lee's face did not assume any appearance of warm interest in this friend, nor of great anxiety to make his acquaintance. In fact, when the Curate had occasionally before introduced her to friends of his, whom he had warmly eulogised, her quick-sighted ladyship had perceived in a moment that they owed their merits principally, if not altogether, to the Curate's imagination acting through his warm heart, being, in fact, the merest stupid respectabilities imaginable. So she walked with the Curate amid the flower-beds towards the bench where Fane was seated, in full expectation of finding there some clerical gentleman clothed inside and out in dinginess, and whose talk was of tithes.

Accordingly she lifted her eyes somewhat languidly

as Fane rose at her approach; but they immediately opened into an expression of interest on encountering the glance of the earnest, thoughtful, intelligent pair that met them. Certainly, there was nothing of the personage she had prefigured in the tall, well-made form, clad in a handsome uniform, that bent towards her as the Curate named "his friend, Captain Fane."

Fane, too, finding that he was in the presence of the peerless dame who had illuminated the Curate's conversation the night before, and knowing from old experience that Josiah's swans often appeared merely geese to the public eye, did not feel his curiosity much excited till he caught that after-glance of hers, contrasting so flatteringly with her first indifferent, somewhat supercilious look, as to appear like an involuntary compliment.

The Curate stood by, watching the interview, and gently rubbing his hands as he glanced from one to the other. He had always thought each of them handsome—but they looked handsomer than they ever had before, to his eyes, as they stood opposite to each other, their faces reflecting interest. And then a strong sense of his own personal identity flashed suddenly on him, as if he could stand apart from the group, and see himself making the third in it, with his plain face and form, his ungraceful attitude, and his dingy dress, contrasting strongly with the grace,

easy strength, and picturesque attire of his friend. The Curate was little accustomed to think about his own appearance, and could not account for the sudden access of egotism.

"Come, don't be ceremonious; shake hands," said the Curate. "I'm sure you'll be friends."

Fane held out his hand—"He should think the better of himself, henceforth, for Josiah's prophecy." A sensation, as of guilt to be atoned for, came over him as he looked at Lady Lee, and thought of his blasphemy about widows on the previous night.

Now Lady Lee's second glance had satisfied her of the truth of a suspicion which the first had communicated to her mind—viz., that she had seen Captain Fane before. He was, however, quickest in remembering where, because she had, on the occasion of their meeting, been attired very much as at present, whereas his uniform made a difference sufficient to puzzle one who had only seen him in a shooting-jacket and wide-awake hat. Presently, however, she recognised the hero of the adventure at the stepping-stones—the more easily, perhaps, because his face had once or twice risen uncalled for to her mental eye during the interval; and, remembering the mode in which he had got her out of her difficulty, she very ungratefully intrenched herself in a double allowance of reserve and coldness. So she merely put the tips

of her fingers in his extended hand, and turned to the Curate.

"She and Juley," she said, "were taking their morning walk, and she had looked in to say that there was an arrival at the Heronry very interesting to the Curate—a packet of new books, which he must come and inspect, and which Rosa was now unpacking." This was one of her ladyship's methods of obliging the Curate, for, knowing that his slender income was entirely inadequate to appease his literary voracity, she used to order regularly all the most expensive works connected with his pursuits, though she never looked into the half of them herself.

The Curate's eyes glistened, and he rubbed his hands vigorously in anticipation. "Now we shall see the great illustrated Ornithology," said he; "glorious! glorious! they say the drawings are like life."

"And that's exactly what they ought to resemble," said Fane, who had seated himself again on the bench with his book open on his knee. "Always take care, Josey, that in your ardour as a naturalist you don't lose sight of nature. For, do but listen now to a passage I had just lighted on in old Gilbert White." And he read as follows—"Echo has always been so amusing to the imagination that the poets have personified her, and in their hands she has been the occasion of many a beautiful fiction. Nor need

the gravest man be ashamed to appear taken with such a phenomenon, since" (mark you, Josey), "*since* it may become the subject of philosophical or mathematical inquiries." "Strange now," went on Fane, "that to this old gentleman, a lover of nature, it should appear that nature was made for science, not science for nature; that he should fancy his partiality for having his imagination stirred by echo needed a scientific excuse!"

"But that was only his printed and published opinion," said Lady Lee, who listened with interest. "Trust me his private one was very different, and, often when shouting like a schoolboy to wake an echo, the idea that pleased him was neither mathematical nor philosophical, but poetical—that of an invisible inhabitant of the solitude."

"Good!" said the Curate, rubbing his hands exultingly. "Ah, you shall find no boy's play here, Durham. But the truth is, that naturalists are sometimes matter-of-fact people, incapable of seeing a double meaning in the great book they study, and in talking to them we must use their language. White was writing to some utilitarian friend, who could better understand his sympathy with science than with nature. And if—"

The Curate paused abruptly, for he became aware that Jennifer was standing at a little distance from

him, with an expression primmer even than usual, and holding his surplice thrown over her arm. "What is it, Mrs Greene?"

"There's a couple that was to have been married at ten, sir—and now it's half-past—the clerk's come to say they're waiting," answered Jennifer.

"Bless me!" cried the Curate, "I had forgotten all about it; quick, good Mrs Greene" (as Jennifer helped him on with the surplice, looking all the time as resentful as if it were her wedding that was delayed). "You see what you have to answer for, between you," said he, hastening through the garden, out of the gate, and down the road, with his surplice streaming behind him as if he were the bearer of a flag of truce.

"It's one body's work to look after him," said Jennifer, as she re-entered the house.

"Come, Juley," said Lady Lee, finding herself left alone with the Captain, bowing to whom she took her departure.

Fane looked at his watch, and, finding his presence would shortly be required on parade, went to the stable, saddled his horse, and walked down the road leading him by the bridle. And as his homeward road was the same as Lady Lee's, and as he walked faster than she and Julius, he, in the natural course of things, overtook them, and

slackened his pace to theirs, and the subject of the conversation he then opened was one in which they had common interest—their friend the Curate. Presently Julius, becoming clamorous for a ride, was lifted into the saddle. There was no such thing as preserving a cold demeanour to one so frank, easy, and clever as Fane—and her ladyship found herself gradually forgetting the origin of their acquaintance, conversing with him nearly as freely as with the Curate; and she felt almost sorry when they halted at the lodge-gate of the Heronry; and Julius being with some trifling resistance dismounted, Fane got into the saddle, took his leave, and they separated. After riding a short distance, he turned and looked back. Lady Lee, too, was looking back, perhaps after Julius, for, immediately calling to the boy to come along and not be troublesome, she walked onward to the house, and the trees hid her from his sight.

CHAPTER XVII.

Day was just breaking on a wide common, distant from London about three hours by the rail. The spirit of improvement had left this heath unenclosed, because, barren as it was, it was more profitable in its present form than if it had waved with golden harvests, for it contained a second-rate race-course; so that enclosures, stealing up as near as they dared, had been made to keep their distance in time to secure ample space for trial ground, morning gallops, and spectators, besides the course itself; though cultivation had come so nigh that the plover, once familiar denizen of the heath, had almost forsaken it, and whistled his wild tune elsewhere. On the skirts of this common, and connected with it by a row of pollards, stood a small village; and towards a stable, situated at the end of the village nearest the common, Bagot and Seager wended their way in the grey of the morning. They had come to prove the mare Goshawk.

The stable-door was padlocked when they reached it, and would have appeared untenanted but for an occasional snort and rustle of the straw within. Seager tapt on the door with his stick, when a small wooden window was opened in the wall above, and a groom who slept in the loft within put his head out. Not a handsome head—indeed, rather villanous in expression naturally, and by no means improved by the small-pox.

"'Tis me, Jim," said Seager. "Look alive—open the door."

"All right, Mr Seager," responded Jim, who forthwith descended the ladder to the ground-floor, and unbarred the door with such promptitude as to lead inevitably to the conclusion that he slept in his clothes, for, the door being opened, there he stood in long grey stable-jacket, blue spotted neckerchief, and wide corduroy breeches and gaiters.

"How's the mare?" was Mr Seager's first question.

The groom looked at Bagot, chewing a straw the while. "Friend of yours, Mr Seager?"

"All right," said Seager. "Speak up, you beggar—how's the mare?"

The groom, thus pleasingly exhorted, drew him aside into the stall next to that in which the mare stood. "Why, she seems right enough now, but

she's been queerish, Mis'r Seager, and that's the truth. She pulled up a little lame o' Wednesday after exercise—hows'ever, as I say, she seems right enough since."

Seager uttered a long "Ha——a! Which leg?" asked he.

"Near fore," replied Jim.

"Take her out," said Seager. "We must see to it. Did anybody see her come in that morning?"

"Think not," replied Jim, who seemed of a laconic turn of speech.

Bagot was standing in the stall looking at the animal, from whose loins he had thrown back the clothing. "Bless my soul, what a quarter!" said Bagot; "and a stifle you might hang your hat on!" Then, walking forward, he passed his hand slowly down both forelegs, and, pausing on the fetlock of the near one, muttered, "A little heat here."

"Take her out, Jim," said Seager.

Jim led her out into the yard in front of the stable, and walked her up and down. There was no sign of lameness.

"All right so far," said Seager. "Trot her down." The mare trotted as sound as she walked.

"Jim," said Seager, "you were either drunk or dreaming last Wednesday. Put her in the trap;

the Colonel and I want to time her. We'll walk on, and you can drive after us."

"You seem to keep her pretty quiet," remarked Bagot, as they left the stable and walked out upon the common.

"I'm forced to," said Seager. "She's done a match or two already, and she's getting a name. They tried to physic her the first time, when she was stabled down at ——, but Jim was too sharp for 'em, and the second time I was on my guard; and hearing some fellows had been looking after her on the sly, and inquiring about her, I sold them a splendid bargain."

"How was that?" inquired the Colonel.

"I'll tell you," returned Seager, chuckling: "I sent Jim to the vet" (*Anglice*, veterinary surgeon) "a couple of nights before the match, when I knew some friends of the other party would be with him, for a lot of cough medicine. Cough medicine for Seager! this made 'em prick up their ears; and Jim made such a confounded mystery about getting it into the stable as set 'em all on the look-out. Sure enough, that night a fellow was seen lurking about the stable, trying to listen at the door. I knew he'd be back again next night, so what d'ye think I did, Lee?—got a horse with the most infernal cough you ever heard, and popt him quietly into the

stable without any one seeing him. Back comes my friend again that night to listen; hears coughing enough to satisfy him, and carries back the report to his employers that the mare was in a bad way, and no mistake. Next morning they were ready, of course, with any odds against her; my friends were on the look-out to take 'em up for me; the mare came to the post in splendid condition, won easy, and I made a very pretty thing of it."

As he concluded this anecdote, Jim, mounted in a light vehicle like a tea-tray on tall wheels, drove the mare gently past them.

"Pull her up this side of the stone, Jim," cried Seager. "Now, Lee, you time her from the white stone there. She shall turn at the half-mile."

Seager walked up and gave the word to the groom, who moved gently to the white stone; and Seager, warning Bagot to be ready, called out, "Off!" as she came abreast of it. At the word, Jim gave a peculiar whistle, hauling tight on the reins, and the mare, like some engine set going, started at a surprising pace, while Bagot, watch in hand, stood marking her. True as a line she went; no wavering or swaying from side to side; hardly any motion of back or head; all steady, except the four legs and feet that struck out like regular and powerful machinery. Round went Jim at the half-mile, coming by a small

circuit into his old tracks; down the course again at unfaltering speed, and, by another small circuit, passing again between Bagot and the starting-point.

"Three—seventeen!" cried the Colonel, as she came abreast of him, Jim leaning back at a tremendous angle, with his feet planted against the footboard in front, and his arms drawn by the tight reins to their full extent.

"She can do more than that," said Seager. "Speak to her, Jim."

Jim shouted, and there was a manifest increase in the rapidity with which the four horse-shoes glittered between the retiring wheels, like the balls which a juggler sends round his head.

"Three—ten!" called Bagot, as she came round again.

"That'll do," said Seager. "Keep to that, Jim."

At the fourth mile Seager called to Jim to pull up.

"Twelve minutes fifty-eight seconds," said Bagot. "No mistake about her pace, if she can hold it."

"Just look at her," said Seager, walking to the spot where she had pulled up, and now stood with her respiration scarcely accelerated by her performance. "There's a pair of bellows for you. Splendid wind, sir. Take her in quietly, Jim. What d'ye think now, Colonel—booked to win, eh?"

As she trotted gently away, Bagot's quick eye detected a perceptible alteration in her gait. He directed Seager's attention to it.

"Bring her back, Jim." Yes, it was so. She was slightly lame on the leg Jim had indicated, though it could not be detected when she was going full speed.

"Unlucky business," said Bagot, as Seager felt the ailing fetlock.

"Well, there'll be time enough to see about curing it, that's one comfort," returned Seager, after a volley of curses on his ill-luck. "One thing you may take your oath of, and that is, that if she's got legs to pull her through it, do it she shall, if I have to shoot her next day. Mind, Jim, not a word!"

Jim winked intelligence, and drove slowly off to the stable.

Bagot looked very grave. "But if she can't do it —if you have to pay up—why, God bless me, fifteen hundred pounds is no joke."

"Time enough to think about it when the time comes," said Mr Seager, who was not prone to anticipate misfortune, nor to be depressed by presentiments of evil. "In the mean time, I shall stay here for a while to look after her, and get a vet to see her quietly.

You can go home; and if she gets all right in a few days, I'll come and look at you again."

So they returned to the village, which was now beginning to be astir. After comforting himself with a little breakfast, Bagot departed by the next train on his way to the Heronry, while Mr Seager remained at the inn to look after the welfare of Goshawk.

CHAPTER XVIII.

What with playing billiards by day and whist by night, and making betting-books with the dragoons, and watching what progress Sloperton might make with Lady Lee, and studying that young man's character, with a view to turning him to future account, Bagot's hands were full of business. And therefore, though he took, as we have seen, the liveliest interest in the mare Goshawk, yet he would not allow even that consideration to separate him long from his friends at the Heronry. Nevertheless, that interest, as aforesaid, was of the liveliest—not so much on account of any abstract sympathy with the gains and losses of his friend Seager, as for the following reason—viz., That he had lost more of late to Mr Seager than he could conveniently pay, and he had a shrewd idea that the degree of pressure for prompt payment of this would depend altogether on the state of his creditor's exchequer. For Seager's

friendship extended thus far, that he would not dun a particular friend so long as he didn't want the money—if he did, why, of course the friend must pay up.

Life at the Heronry now began to assume an aspect somewhat similar to that which it had borne in Sir Joseph's bachelor days. Stalls that of late stood empty were now generally occupied by officers' chargers; the clicking of billiard-balls was incessant in the hall; and there were more riding parties. The Colonel was of course always charmed to see the dragoons, and they were equally delighted to escape from Doddington. And though these visits were ostensibly made for the most part to Bagot, yet what could be more natural than that, once in the house, they should wish to pay their respects to the fairer portion of its inhabitants? Thus it happened that there were few mornings when the military visitors did not, on some pretence or other, find their way to the drawing-room. In the evening Bagot would either go over to dine at their mess at the Bush, or some of them would stay and share his bachelor's cheer in the snug apartments he tenanted in the Heronry, on which occasions Orelia and Rosa and Lady Lee, traversing distant corridors on their way to bed, would sometimes be startled by "a sound of revelry by night," and, pausing, flat candlestick

in hand, would listen for a moment to a wild chorus, led probably by Mr Oates, and wherein Bagot' sbass took a prominent part, to which distance and reverberation gave a somewhat unearthly character, like the chorus with which Don Juan descends to his infernal destination.

But, notwithstanding these nocturnal orgies, by day all was decorum. Even Mr Oates lost all his boisterous confidence as he entered the presence of the ladies, growing quite tame, almost bashful, and sometimes, when suddenly addressed, blushing to deep pinkness between his extensive shirt-collars. And he would envy Bruce for the flowing ease and openness with which he conversed with Rosa, as well as for the interest and friendliness with which she returned it: for Mr Oates himself, when he had with great effort and manœuvring obtained a place at Rosa's side, and saw her face turned towards him with the best-humoured smile in the world, would find himself quite unable to enjoy the advantage of the position he had taken such pains to secure, and would wonder why on earth he wasn't able to chat away with her like Bruce. The consequence of this was, that at length the friendship which had subsisted between him and Bruce was threatened with dissolution; Oates becoming rude and sometimes sarcastic towards his associate, and thus rendering the joint

occupancy of the grocer's lodgings less smooth and pleasant than before.

Tindal could not flatter himself that he made any great progress with Orelia; on the contrary, she received all his attempts to propitiate her with a coldness amounting to incivility, and would sometimes be not at home when he called. Bagot, perceiving this, would good-naturedly decoy Orelia down to the hall, to get a lesson in billiards, whenever he knew Tindal was coming, and the Major, entering unexpectedly, and receiving a stately and frosty greeting from the young lady, would look on, admiring her attitude as she bent over the table, applauding her skill when she cannoned or made a hazard, and sometimes venturing to instruct her how to form a better bridge, by elevating her knuckles and stretching out her thumb, while the contact into which his fingers were necessarily brought with that soft hand, gave the grim, undemonstrative Major very considerable pleasure.

"Come and finish this game for me, Tindal," the friendly Colonel would then say; "I must be off to the stables." And the Major, with grim alacrity, would seize Bagot's abandoned cue; and nobody could possibly have recognised the stern martinet, whose glance had made the whole parade thrill, or had caused the heart of some hard-drinking dragoon culprit to quail within him in the orderly room an

hour before, in the alert, courteous, somewhat subdued cavalier, who now hovered round the queenly Orelia.

"Allow me, Miss Payne—if you strike your ball so as to hit this one on the side just where the light falls —and gently, if you please, very gently—you will go into that middle pocket."

"Excellently done!" he would resume, as Orelia made the hazard he recommended. "Now you have an easy cannon on the balls. Hit the red hard and full, and strike your own a little on the side so as to screw, and you'll come off that top cushion and cannon. Why, there now—beautiful! Really, Miss Payne, if you go on in this way, you must give me points."

Notwithstanding all this, the Major did not make much progress with her imperial highness. "I'm afraid I've offended Miss Payne," he said to Bagot—"I don't seem to get on with her."

"Gad, sir, a strange girl that!" responded Bagot; "deuced high and *noli me tangere* when she likes. But that makes her the more enchanting when she does unbend—ha, Tindal?" To which the Major unhesitatingly assented.

"Can't you get up some show with your men?" suggested Bagot presently: "girls like that sort of thing."

"The very thing," said Tindal. "A review in the grounds—eh? Full-dress review, with manœuvres? By Jove, I'll propose it to her at once."

Accordingly he did so; said the ground was exactly what he wanted for a good morning's drill; was sure the men would acquit themselves better than usual under the influence of the ladies' bright eyes; and, if Orelia would promise to sanction the display with her presence, he would forthwith entreat permission of Lady Lee to carry the project into execution. He was delighted to hear Orelia express her approval in a more cordial tone than he was accustomed to; and, secretly applauding the generalship of Bagot, he made arrangements for the review to take place in a few days.

The more Sloperton saw of his new-found relation Lady Lee, the more he became confirmed in the opinion that she would, whenever he should think proper to make his proposals, do credit to his taste in the eyes of all the world. Her ladyship always received him hospitably, and sometimes seemed amused at his conversation; and he had bestowed so much attention in attiring his person to the best advantage, on the occasions of his visits, and displayed such inexhaustible varieties of harmonies and contrasts of cut and colour, in the selection of cravats, waistcoats, trousers, and topics of discourse, that he felt

assured of always appearing to the very best advantage—which, in the opinion of the conquering Captain himself, was synonymous with being irresistible.

The only thing he didn't altogether approve of was, that Fane—who seldom troubled himself to pay visits, and, when he did, still seldomer crossed Sloperton's path—had once or twice come into the drawing-room at the Heronry, and interfered with him sadly, by turning the conversation to matters which the handsome exquisite knew nothing about, and took no interest in, though Lady Lee had immediately brightened up to a degree of animation which he had never seen her display before. There was also a Parson—a fellow with no manner, and not the slightest idea of dress—who came sometimes with Fane, sometimes alone, and bored one with talk about books and philosophy. On the last occasion, indeed, when those two had come there together, Sloperton, who was also present, and in full flow when they entered, had never, from the moment of their appearance, been able to command the least attention, but had sat like a handsome well-dressed figure by Madame Tussaud. And he might possibly have felt uneasy about this, had he not luckily received next morning a parcel of clothes from his tailor in town, and immediately rode over to the Heronry in

such an exquisite waistcoat as, he felt assured, must place him at once beyond all rivalry.

To many ardent young assertors of the supremacy of intellect, the divinity of the female sex, and the like doctrines, these expectations of Captain Sloperton may seem presumptuous, and impossible to be gratified. The habitual romance-reader, too, knowing that Lady Lee is of more value than many Slopertons, and that poetical justice must be done though the heavens totter, growls incredulity. But if we look at the sources whence romances should in their essence be drawn—if we look at life and reality —where, then, is the improbability of a cultivated, imaginative, nay, gifted woman, linking herself "with joy, revel, and applause," as Cassio has it, to some half-souled lump of humanity, who, perchance, shall not even possess the perfections that please the eye? Contented, nay proud, in the possession of her "most filthy bargain"—seemingly unconscious that all who are capable of appreciating her are wondering at her choice—a choice made apparently for no better reason than because she would not say no—she flings away, without any audible sigh, all hope of marital congeniality, letting her affection hang on the object of it, like a rich garment on a rusty nail.

If each of those who form the natural aristocracy of the sex were resolved to uphold the dignity of her

order, choosing rather "to live a barren sister all her life" than to wed one whom she could not honestly, and in her soul, acknowledge for her lord and master —taking for her motto *palmam qui meruit ferat*— "I am for him who deserves me"—what a lure were here for emulative man! How would blue ribbons, peerages, thanks of both Houses, fade into insignificance before this Legion of Honour, apparently instituted by Nature herself! What were droves of oxen, and brazen armour, and long-haired captives to Achilles, while his Briseis was yet in the tent of "dog-faced, deer-hearted" Agamemnon? And, perhaps, the emulative man aforesaid figures to himself such a fair prize—feels that he will try to deserve it —dreams of it, and is cheered by the vision—at length sees his ideal—but sees it only to find this Titania, queen of the fairies, enamoured of some Bully Bottom, whom, while kissing his "fair large ears," and decking his sleek head with musk roses, she lovingly apostrophises as "her gentle joy." Therefore, let no ambitious, amorous numskull despair merely because he is a numskull; he may yet live envied of the gifted of the earth, and pass from this world never suspecting that he has, through life, at bed and board, entertained an angel.

And yet, Lady Lee, if you, untaught by experience, should *twice* profane that hand and heart of yours—

what hope or sympathy were then for you? What word could you say in arrest of judgment, ere the Fates decree, either that such marriage-bed shall be to you a Procrustes-bed, whereon your mind and tastes and sympathies shall be clipt to the level of those of your companion; or else, that you shall wear away your life, filled with a contempt which must never be spoken?

But the proverb says a cat may look at a queen; and animals, not much higher in the scale of creation than cats, and lower than the Slopertons, may aspire to the Lady Lees.

This truth the reader may find illustrated in the next chapter, where we shall see who this wooer is who now comes riding to the Heronry, and whom we have lost sight of for many chapters.

CHAPTER XIX.

Squire Dubbley was sitting all alone in Monkstone, after breakfast, trying to wile away the time till a suitable hour should arrive for mounting his steed and cantering over to the Heronry to prosecute his suit with Lady Lee.

Since his conversation with Bagot, the Squire's intentions, heretofore very vague and uncertain, had taken shape and substance. So long as the idea of making love in that quarter had been confined to his own breast and brain, it had floated there in a misty, desultory fashion, sometimes more distinct, sometimes fading almost to nothing, but always appearing rather as something that might be, than as what certainly would be. But now that Bagot had talked over the subject with him in a business-like manner, and had, moreover, brought it fairly within the limits of plain matter-of-fact by the little pecuniary transaction between them, the Squire, with the facility of a

weak brain, considered the matter as settled, all but a few necessary preliminaries. These he had resolved to complete forthwith, chuckling to himself, with a sort of imbecile exultation, at the thought of making his declaration of love, and being accepted without the mediation of Bagot, who fancied himself so essential an auxiliary. So he tried, somewhat impatiently, to wile away the time, till the hour of his visit should be at hand.

This operation of wiling away the time was a task of peculiar difficulty to the Squire—in fact, perfectly herculean. The poor Squire, when he could not shoot or hunt, had no more resources within himself than a kitten deprived of its tail. Books he looked upon not merely with indifference, but with positive disgust, as if they had been sentient and superior beings, personally hostile to him, and repelling his advances with calm disdain. This he had resented in early life by filling such as were thrust upon him with blots and dog's-ears, and tearing them up to paper kites with ; and, later, by using them for gun-wadding and cigar-lights. But since his advancement in life had caused him to feel his deficiencies, he had begun to look on learning with a secret respect, as being immediately and constantly connected with his interests. At first, he was ashamed to make his ignorance public by applying for instruction, but at last he

bethought himself of having recourse to a person whose poverty would render the purchase of his secresy easy, while he possessed the necessary qualifications for the office of preceptor.

This person, Mr Randy, was clever, and had been well educated, but had not flourished in the world owing to his incurable habits of conviviality. Situation after situation had slipt jovially away from him; whenever he met with a piece of good fortune, he seemed to mistake it for care, for he immediately drowned it in the bowl—till he had been employed as an usher in the grammar-school at Doddington; and this post, also, he had forfeited, having twice profaned that temple of Minerva, by entering it in a state of inebriety. Subsequently he supported himself by giving private lessons in classics and mathematics, and reading up with university men who wanted to cram in the vacations, and spent the money thus procured in the company of some congenial acquaintances in his favourite taproom at the Grapes.

So, at certain hours of the day and night, there might have been seen in the little room at Monkstone, which the Squire called his study, the curious spectacle of a gentleman, of considerable property and mature years, taking lessons in the rudiments of education from a seedy, snuffy individual, in a rusty, musty suit of black.

The Squire looked out of his window and whistled. It wanted yet two hours of noon—two mortal hours lay in dreary desert expanse before him, with a glimpse of green country beyond. He knew it was in vain to attempt to study by himself, having tried it once or twice, and found his attention wandering off beyond recall every half minute, in spite of all his efforts to fix it; for the Squire could not govern his own mind in the least, notwithstanding it was such a weak one. He would have liked to amuse himself by cleaning his gun, and oiling the locks; but then that was his servant's business, and he did not choose to pay servants for doing nothing. One little green spot in the desert had offered itself since breakfast—and that was when he went to his cellar, and drew himself a foaming tumbler of strong October; but the flavour of this had died away, and he dared not drink another, for fear of muddling himself before the interview with Lady Lee.

With more complacency than usual, therefore, the Squire beheld the portly debauched figure of Mr Randy approaching the house—a tall figure, with thin arms and legs, a large paunch, over which was buttoned, with difficulty, a threadbare black surtout, and wearing a black stock, worn at the edges, beneath which was visible a portion of what was probably a flannel waistcoat, and which was overhung

by his brown, flabby cheeks. Dignity and growing infirmity struggled together in his gait, which was at once majestic and tremulous.

The Squire tapt on the window-pane to attract Mr Randy's attention, and put his finger on his lips, to intimate that he wished his approach to be silent and secret; and Mr Randy, with a nod of intelligence, exchanged his crunching walk over the gravel for a stealthy tripping pace, like a corpulent fairy, and came warily up the steps of the porch, as if there were a herd of deer in the lobby which he intended to stalk. The Squire was behind the door, holding it softly ajar for him—affording him so little space for entering, that his portly person was somewhat jammed and crushed before he effected his ingress, the lower button of his black surtout, long injured at the roots, being torn right out of the cloth.

"Softly," said Mr Dubbley, motioning him towards the study; "don't let these confounded servants hear you. If any of them should come in, we'll talk about the same business as before." Mr Dubbley felt so much shame at being engaged, at his time of life, and with his property, on the business of his education, that he kept the object of Randy's visits a profound secret from the household, and when interrupted by any of the domestics during his studies, had, with great ingenuity, feigned to be con-

versing on some matter of an entirely different nature.

"I won't offer you anything to drink after your walk," said the Squire, as they sat down at the table; "because, if I see you drinking, I shall drink myself, and I've reasons for keeping clear this morning; but when I'm gone, I'll leave out the spirit-bottles for you."

Mr Randy bowed gravely in token of his acquiescence. "What shall we study to-day?" he inquired, putting on a pair of brass-mounted spectacles.

"That's just what I pay you to settle," said the Squire; "isn't it? Here I am in want of teaching —here you are in want of money; we'll make a fair exchange, and you can't expect me to do any of your work for you."

Randy coloured at the coarseness of the Squire's speech; he would have resented it, as he was frequently tempted to do, only he could not afford resentment, but was accustomed to revenge himself privately at night with his companions of the tap-room, by showing the Squire up for their entertainment, and pouring forth floods of eloquent invective on the ignorant upstart, who, by virtue of his dirty acres, "dared to insult a scholar and a gentleman."

"Our object," began Mr Randy, lowering his head, and looking at the Squire through the space between the tops of his spectacles and the points of his bushy eyebrows, and rattling his *r*'s very much — "our object is, to impart as much general information as we can, without going into the tedious rudiments of scholastic learning. We wish to be conversant with the topics of the day—to bear our part in general conversation with credit—to form and deliver an opinion on points of public interest, without falling into any grievous or ridiculous blunders."

The Squire nodded.

"Having, therefore, in our previous studies, run through the geography of the most prominent and important countries, with slight sketches of their previous histories, we will now recall and apply our recollections to some of the leading topics of the day."

"Hang me, if I haven't forgotten every word of it," muttered the poor Squire.

"Patience, my good sir, patience. Rome was not built in a day; nor can Squire Dubbley be qualified to shine in society in a week or a month. Many centuries ago, a philosopher and man of science, with whom we shall, by-and-by, I hope, become acquainted, told a great monarch who, like other great men, was somewhat impatient," (here Mr Randy

chuckled facetiously,) "that there was no royal road to geometry. Learning is one of those things," said Mr Randy, with the conscious dignity of a possessor, "that no power can command, nor wealth purchase."

"Then what the deuce am I throwing away my money for with you?" asked the Squire. "Perhaps I should get on faster with some other instructor."

"Patience, my good sir," again urged the preceptor; "money may do much, though not all; it may provide us with the means, if we only make a right and diligent use of them. Here, now, is the newspaper of the latest date; we will see what the world is talking about, and we will apply what we have already acquired to the matters thus brought under our notice."

So Mr Randy sat and read the newspaper—an occupation he took great pleasure in—and expounded portions of it to the Squire. After the latter had listened for some little time attentively, he rose, and, saying it was dry work, produced a case of bottles from a cupboard, and a couple of tumblers; and these latter being filled with a refreshing compound of rum, water, lemon-juice, and sugar, Mr Randy's countenance, after a long pull at the same, brightened perceptibly, and he read all the columns of Foreign Intelligence, and descanted on our foreign relations as if he had been the private and confiden-

tial friend of Lord Palmerston. The Squire, however, began to relax in his attention—he was thinking about his approaching visit to the Heronry, and how he should deport himself there.

"You're a sort of fellow that knows everything," observed the Squire presently. "What should you say, now, was the kind of conversation to take a fine lady?—an accomplished person, you know."

Mr Randy always answered every question the Squire thought proper to propound (some of them nonsensical enough) with a composed and grave promptitude, as if it had long employed his thoughts. He laid the newspaper across his knees, took off and wiped his spectacles, and hemmed thrice before answering.

"That," said Mr Randy, "would depend on circumstances: first, on the degree of impression I wished to produce; secondly, on the age, character, and disposition of the lady, and the degree of intimacy I was favoured with."

"Well, suppose you were regularly in love," said the Squire, "and the lady was young and handsome, and deuced clever and all that?"

"In that case," returned Mr Randy, "I should evince my partiality by glances, sighs, pressure of the hand, and all those understood tokens of passion"—and, by way of illustration, Mr Randy leered at the

Squire from under his shaggy brows, with a pair of eyes so muddy and watery that it was difficult to say where the pupils ended, and the whites, or rather the yellows, began; emitting at the same time a sigh that filled the apartment with many cubic feet of vapourised alcohol. "Having thus established an understanding, I should gradually, and by delicate degrees, approach the subject of love, by broaching collateral and kindred topics."

"Kindred topics!" repeated the Squire. "What! praise her relations, eh?"

"Not at all," said Mr Randy, inwardly making a note of the Squire's mistake for the benefit of his friends at the "Grapes" that night, to whom he would serve it up with some sauce piquant of his own. "I should become by degrees sentimental—converse of poetry, of romances, of which love was the subject."

"But I don't know a line of poetry," muttered the Squire, "except some songs. I know some capital songs—'Old Towler,' and 'Nancy Dawson,' and 'A-hunting we will go;' but perhaps she wouldn't care about them."

"Never mind," said Mr Randy; "talk of nuptial felicity—paint to her the delights of a union where—"

"But suppose she knows all about that better than

me," interrupted the Squire, "in consequence of having been married before?"

"Oh, indeed—a widow!" said Randy; "that simplifies the matter immensely. In that case, I should be much more direct in my approaches, and, after a few short indications of partiality, should propose at once."

"It's very clear, Randy," said the Squire, "that, though you talk so glibly about it, you never tried it yourself—at least, not with the kind of person I'm speaking of: if you had, you'd know, that, for all it seems so easy, yet, when it comes to the point, there's a kind of cursed feeling comes all over one as if you were going to be hanged, and drives everything you had to say out of your head; and she, instead of helping you out of the mess, looks all the while so cool and innocent that it makes you worse than ever."

Mr Randy considered for a minute. "If I found my powers of speech desert me, from bashfulness," said he, "I should convey my wishes in a letter."

"Capital!" thought the Squire; "I never thought of that. 'Twouldn't be half so nervous a thing to slip a letter into her hand as to sputter it all out by word of mouth. Come, now," said the Squire, putting a sheet of paper and a pen before his adviser, "let's see what you can make of it—just out of curi-

osity," added the cunning Squire, "not that I want anything of the sort for myself."

So Mr Randy refilled his tumbler, and by its assistance concocted such an epistle as Dr Johnson might be supposed to indite if he had fallen in love with an empress; and having read it aloud to the Squire, the latter seized upon it, and, saying it might be useful some time or other, put it away in his desk.

He now affected to be particularly busy, in order to get rid of Randy, whose departure he further facilitated by locking up the spirits; and that gentleman, seeing no prospect of getting any more punch, having at length departed, the Squire sat down, and, having made a fair copy of the love-letter, posted away to the Heronry.

CHAPTER XX.

Lady Lee was seated in the drawing-room in company with Julius, who was in disgrace, and undergoing punishment at the hands of Dr Watts, one of whose pious poems he had been condemned to commit to heart. The offence which had called down this visitation on his head was a personal assault upon Miss Fillett. Julius, on seeing Rosa and Orelia prepare to set forth on their ride, became perfectly outrageous to accompany them, and, having rushed down stairs in defiance of orders, had been captured by Kitty just as he was in the act of pulling Sergeant Cumbermare's horse by the tail; but, far from feeling gratitude to her for saving his brains from being kicked out, he at once proceeded (as she expressed it) to make his teeth all but meet in the back of her hand, and to kick her shins into all the colours of the rainbow. This description of her wrongs, far from melting Julius, as she intended,

only excited his curiosity, and, being partial to rainbows, he privately resolved to watch her when she pulled off her stockings. So, having obstinately declined to apologise, he was now seated on a low stool near his parent, with Dr Watts in his lap, swelling with indignation, and glancing furtively at his cat Pick, who was polishing his face with his paw on the hearth-rug; and instead of committing to memory the masterly distinction drawn by the amiable Doctor between the line of conduct to be pursued by Christian children, and that excusable in dogs and bears and lions, he was thinking how pleasant it would be to steal behind Pick, and, clasping him round the neck, to draw him into his lap, and kiss him behind his whisker, and on the top of his head, and subsequently tickle him into fury, till he growled and bit and clawed with his fore legs, and spurred with his hind ones.

Lady Lee was reading Pope. Her taste in poetry had, of late years, undergone an entire revolution—and whereas, in her spinster days, nothing was too romantic, high-flown, and enthusiastic for her, she had now begun to condemn everything not capable of being brought within the strict rules of plain common-sense. And the best of it was, that she really persuaded herself she enjoyed the melodious worldly wisdom of the little Queen Anne's man; though,

between you and me, reader, she had no more taste for worldly wisdom than she had for playing at leap-frog.

However, she went on reading, sometimes pausing to repeat a terse couplet to herself, and wondering how the man could manage to pack all that sense so neatly into two lines, and fancying she liked it, till she was roused by Julius poking her on the elbow with his book.

"Can you repeat it, you shocking child?"

Julius nodded, putting out his lip at the epithet.

"Go on, then."

Julius commenced, casting a wistful glance at Pick. "Let cats delight to bark and bite—"

"Cats, sir!" said Lady Lee, returning the book to him, after tapping his cheek with it. "Go back to your stool," whither he accordingly retired; and his mamma was resuming her study of Pope, when Miss Fillett, walking into the room on her prismatic legs, announced Mr Dubbley.

Mr Dubbley came in rubbing his forehead, and very nervous. He had started for the Heronry in a state of great elevation: exhilarated by punch, and the letter he had in his pocket, proposing seemed to him the easiest thing in the world; he laughed as he thought of his previous failures. But his spirits had gradually evaporated as he approached the house—

they went off more and more rapidly as he followed Kitty up-stairs—and when he entered Lady Lee's presence, not even the dregs remained.

"Charming day," said Mr Dubbley, polishing his temples till the small tufts that grew thereon threatened to disappear altogether; and, nothing else occurring to him, he then said, "Splendid day!" and at last grew quite enthusiastic about the day. "Never saw such a fine day," said Mr Dubbley.

The Squire, not having any other remark at hand, took to his old resource of polishing his skull, and looked round the room. There was a refinement and luxury about its arrangements that caused him to feel as if in a foreign country. Pieces of unfinished embroidery and crochet-work were scattered about; books that he did not understand the names of, in rich bindings; little mysterious articles of papier-maché, and ivory, and filigree, whose use he could by no means conjecture; and Lady Lee herself, as she rustled to her chair in a dress revealing masses of rich lace at the bosom and sleeves, while amid the latter glittering bracelets peeped out, tended to strengthen the idea, which now began to transmit itself through the Squire's somewhat obtuse perceptions, that she lived in quite a different atmosphere, and at immeasurable distance from him.

"Pray, take this chair, Mr Dubbley," said Lady

Lee; "you will be more comfortable than in that"—for Mr Dubbley, having put his hat in a low chair usually appropriated to Rosa as a lounging-chair, had, in his confusion, sat down on the top of it, and it being a pretty stiff and solid beaver, remained unconsciously perched thereon till it suddenly gave way, and the Squire's knees came rather violently in contact with his nose as he leant forward in a courteous posture.

"Bless my soul!" cried Mr Dubbley, starting up and looking ruefully at the crushed hat; "there's quite a fate about my hats; this is the second I've sat upon this year. However, that's of no consequence," said the Squire, recollecting himself; "lots more hats to be bought. 'Twould have been worse if it had been my head." This was indisputable, though it was not easy to see how Mr Dubbley could crush his own head by sitting down on it.

"Do you find Monkstone solitary?" asked Lady Lee presently, to divert his thoughts from the calamity.

"Monstrous solitary, 'pon my life," said Mr Dubbley; "it gets worse every day." ('Now why should she ask that,' he thought, 'if she didn't mean something by it?') "If there was somebody else there," he added, "it wouldn't be half so solitary."

"And will nobody come to see you, then, Mr Dubbley?"

"Yes, yes," said the Squire; "a good many might like to come if I asked 'em; but it isn't every one I would ask. If some people that I know would come for better for worse," and the Squire looked wonderfully arch as he repeated, "for better for worse, you know—I'd rather than a thousand pounds."

"Dear me," thought Lady Lee, "Mr Dubbley has certainly fallen in love with somebody; who can it be? Then why don't you ask them," said she, smiling, "and ascertain their wishes on the subject?"

"Why, so I will," said the delighted Squire, who, feeling certain that he had made his meaning perfectly obvious, and that he was meeting with the most charming encouragement, began to fumble in his pocket for the letter. "Faint heart never won fair lady," he muttered to himself. "Take time by the fetlock, you know."

"I wish you all success in your wooing, Mr Dubbley," said Lady Lee, "and hope shortly to congratulate you on the result."

"Now, what can she mean by that?" thought the Squire, letting the letter slip back into his pocket. "I mustn't be rash—hang it, no; I must feel my way." And the Squire's warm feelings, suddenly condensed by the chill, broke out over his forehead in little beads like morning dew.

"Delightful thing the married state," said the Squire presently, remembering Mr Randy's instructions. "Charming state of things, when two hearts that have long beat for one another are joined together in holy matrimony, and nothing to cut their love in two." Mr Dubbley paused, rather breathless after this eloquent flight, in which he had mingled the form of publishing the banns of marriage with his recollections of a valentine he had once written to a bricklayer's daughter.

"Why, you speak like one inspired by his subject," said her ladyship. "But take care, Mr Dubbley! if you indulge such bright visions before marrying, you may be disappointed afterwards."

"Not the least afraid of that," said the Squire; "we understand one another too well for that. What should prevent me and—and her that I'm talking of, from being as happy as the day's long?"

"Nothing that I know of," returned her ladyship, "provided there is no striking disparity of any kind."

"Ah, she's thinking about my income, now," thought the Squire; "I'm all right there. I ought to have mentioned something about it in my letter." And again the Squire dived up to his elbow in his breast-pocket. "No objection on that score," said he; "no mistake about my property; all safe and sure, and rents regularly paid."

"Tiresome, absurd man!" thought Lady Lee; "what does he suppose I care about his property, or his rents, or his love-affairs? But there are other disparities," she said, "more fatal to nuptial felicity than that of income—disposition, for instance —age—tastes—pursuits—intellect."

At the mention of this last item, the Squire once more let the letter fall back into his pocket.

"She's got cleverness enough for both," said the Squire. "Perhaps she's a very accomplished person, and perhaps I may be the same too in time—who knows? I daresay you don't know that I've been getting up a good deal of general information lately?"

Lady Lee "had not heard of his process of mental culture," she said.

"Wait a bit!" said the Squire, with a knowing look; "perhaps I may disappoint those who think me a fool yet. I'm rubbing up my learning—all for your—I mean her sake too. She's the only person in the world I'd take the trouble for."

"What a devoted attachment yours appears to be!" said her ladyship. "It certainly merits success." And she smiled so pleasantly and encouragingly that the Squire dived once more into his pocket, and this time brought the letter fairly out, and put it in the crown of his hat, ready for delivery at the next favourable moment.

He was several times on the point of going down on his knees and presenting it, and as often baffled by some chilling remark from the unconscious object of his admiration, and by his increasing sense of her unapproachableness. The quick alternations of hot and cold fits that he experienced were so trying, that he made up his mind to yield next time to the impulse, and declare himself like a man. But the impulse came, and was nipt like its predecessors; and the poor despairing Squire felt a load taken off his mind when the door opened, and Rosa and Orelia entered, full of conversation for Lady Lee. So he rose; and, muttering to himself that his chance was over for that day, took his leave, with the impression that he had left his intentions as profound a secret as ever.

The Squire was riding off in some small agitation of spirits, when Miss Fillett suddenly popt out from behind a laurel bush in the shrubbery, and beckoned him to ride aside from the path; and an interview with Kitty being more to his taste than one with her mistress, and one in which he played his part with far more ease, he obeyed with alacrity.

"Well, sir, and how have you got on with my lady?" asked Kitty, pertly enough.

"Eh, what?" said Mr Dubbley. "What have I to do with your lady?"

"Ho! you think a person has no eyes, I suppose; as if I couldn't read in a minute when a gentleman's in love—or a lady either, for that matter," added Miss Fillett, meaningly.

"Or a lady either?" repeated the Squire. "What! has your mistress been showing any—any testimonials of affection? any partiality for anybody, my girl?"

"Perhaps she has, perhaps she hasn't," said Kitty. "But I'll defy her to like anybody without me knowing. Bless you, sir, she couldn't keep her parshalities from me if she wished ever so."

"And what d'ye think about my chance, eh? Come, don't be tormenting! Amazing pretty girl, upon my life," muttered the Squire in a stage whisper, intended to melt Kitty's heart.

Miss Fillett pursed up her mouth into a round aperture, and, glancing sideways at the Squire, shook her head till the lappets of her smart cap vibrated—intending thereby to express, that she could unfold a tale if she chose.

"Oh, hang it! if you're so fond of your secrets, you may keep 'em," said the Squire. "I'll find out for myself. I was very near finding out this morning."

"Take care!" said Kitty, holding up her finger

with a warning look; "take care what you do, sir! Don't be precipitous."

"What! you think I've no chance then?" said Mr Dubbley, hastily.

"I didn't say so," said Miss Fillett.

"Then, what the deuce do you mean?" asked the Squire, with great impatience.

"Just this—don't you be rash, sir. Leave me to tell you how my lady's disposed to you; and when I say Wait, wait—and when I say Propose, propose."

"What a dear girl you are!" said the Squire, gallantly stooping from the saddle to bestow a salute upon Miss Fillett; but she eluded him, and desired him to behave himself. "Take care, sir, or I shall let my lady know." The Squire making a second attempt, his hat fell off, and the letter which he had placed therein dropt on the ground. Miss Fillett immediately picked it up, and, looking at the superscription, at once divined its nature.

"Ho, ho! a love-letter," she said, looking at the Squire. Mr Dubbley nodded. "'Twas a providence," she continued, solemnly, "that you didn't give it yourself to-day. I wouldn't—no, sir—I wouldn't have answered for the consequences. *I'll* take care of it now, and when I see the right time's come, I'll deliver it."

Mr Dubbley perceived that this would save him an

infinity of embarrassment and trouble. "'Pon my life," said he, "you're a great deal cleverer than me at these matters. I'll leave it to you, then. Good-by; shake hands, you know;" and Kitty bestowing hers, the cunning Squire drew her towards him. But Kitty struggled, and pinched him on the arm, and then saying, "There's my lady's bell; come to the white gate to-morrow evening," broke away, and vanished, holding up her finger once before disappearing, to impress on the Squire the necessity of attending to her advice.

"By George, what a jolly girl she is!" said the Squire before he rode off. "I'm not sure I don't like her best after all."

Kitty saw the Squire's admiring glance as she turned to look back for the last time, and her wily head was forthwith furnished with an ambitious idea, which she put by for future consideration. This idea she did not think it necessary to communicate to Bagot that evening, when she reported progress to that chief conspirator; nor did she tell him that she had been unable to resist the temptation of reading Mr Dubbley's love-letter before putting it in the fire; but so much as she did confide to the Colonel, called forth his warm approbation.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was on a bright sunshiny morning in June that the dragoons, three abreast, their helmets and accoutrements glittering, their red coats in brilliant relief against the verdure and foliage around, passed through the lodge-gate of the Heronry, and formed on the ground which was to be the scene of their manœuvres.

A row of carriages, containing most of the ladies of the neighbourhood, was drawn up in a favourable position, and there were also plenty of spectators on foot. There was Lady Lee driving a small double pony-carriage, with Orelia seated by her side, and Rosa and Julius behind. There was Sir Christopher Clumber in a great lumbering coach as big as a diligence, with his two daughters and a maiden aunt. There was the little old Earl of Castle-comical, with his brown wig curled in the Prince-regent fashion, up to a peak on the top of his head, with Brummel-

lian cravat and coat, and with opera-glass ready for observation. There was Mr Hobbes, a neighbouring mill-owner, with his fat wife, who had fed herself to such a size that Orelia christened her Hobbes's Leviathan. There was Squire Dubbley, mounted on his best hunter, talking to Bagot, who paid very little attention to him. There was the Curate ambling easily along on Diana, not the most graceful seat in the world. There was Mr Seager, who, growing tired of his lonely supervision of Goshawk, had run down to refresh his mind by contact with Bagot's for a day or two. And in the background appeared a long row of tables, at which the warriors might, like Homer's heroes, refresh themselves after their toils and dangers, and a tent containing similar arrangements for the behoof of the officers and ladies.

Leaving his officers and men drawn up in order, the Major galloped up to pay his respects to Lady Lee. And the little Earl got out of his carriage, and, requesting to be introduced to Major Tindal, courteously presented a view of the curious arrangement of the curls on the top of his wig to the Major, who bowed his plumed head over the saddle. And the populace looked on with great admiration at this meeting of Nobility and War.

Then, after a little preliminary chat, the Major requested Lady Lee's permission to begin, and

straightway galloping to the front, called his men to attention, and prepared to march past. No Roman consul, marching in triumph with captive generals following him, ever felt prouder than the grim Major, in front of his well-drilled detachment. There was a little red flag planted at a small distance in front of the row of carriages, close to which the Major, after saluting, took up his position, while the troops went past at a walk, the officers likewise saluting as they passed the flagstaff. And as Captain Sloperton gracefully lowered his sword, Letitia Clumber was heard to exclaim that he, the Captain, was "a divine man;" and many other young females, as also fat Mrs Hobbes, quite agreed with her on the divinity question. They came round, then, at a trot and at a gallop—bits, stirrups, and scabbards jingling, swords flashing, plumes waving, and horses champing and tossing their heads—all very martial and imposing—at least all except Cornet Suckling, whose charger, becoming unruly, manifested a desire to dash through the ranks in front of him; his afflicted rider, with his helmet hanging down his back, the chin-scales nearly strangling him, while his plumes, like Lord Cranstoun's after Deloraine had charged him, "went scattering on the gale," looking dreadfully unhappy and undragoon-like, to the great wrath of his choleric commander, who growled some improper expressions

between his ground teeth at the sight of him. In spite of the popular sympathy which Sloperton's appearance elicited, Rosa, in a whisper to Orelia over the back of the carriage, asked, "If she didn't think Mr Bruce looked better than any of them?"

Then they charged in troops, and in divisions, and in line—and threw out skirmishers, who fired their carbines and galloped in upon the main body—and they changed their front, and wheeled, and deployed, and formed close column, and opened out again, all to the great delight of the uninitiated. And then, the review being over, they dismounted and picketed their horses, while the tables were being spread for the gallant riders.

"A beautiful sight you have afforded us," said the little Earl, as the Major rode up. "The ladies are enchanted."

"Why, I think the men were tolerably steady," said Tindal, taking off his helmet, and resting it on the pommel of his saddle, while he wiped his forehead. The Major, while he spoke thus indifferently, secretly thought they had been pre-eminently smart, and wished Lord Cardigan could have been there to see.

One group of chargers, picketed beneath an oak, looked so very picturesque that Orelia was desirous of sketching them, and sent into the house for draw-

ing materials. Seated in a chair in front of them, she began her sketch; and during its progress she called to the dragoon Onslow, who happened, quite unaccountably, to be standing near the horses, to come and look at it.

Now, it happened that Mr Seager had just stepped up, in his usual familiar, not-to-be-snubbed kind of fashion, to speak to Orelia, whom he always took particular pleasure in addressing, because he saw she couldn't endure him. Casting his eyes on Onslow as he drew near, Seager stared for a moment in his face, and called out, "Ha! the devil! why it's—"

The dragoon looked up at the sound of his voice, and instantly put his finger to his lips. "Are you not mistaken?" he said; and then, going up to Seager, drew him a short distance apart. Orelia, witnessing this strange encounter with great amazement and curiosity, noticed that Seager had suddenly grown very pale.

"What brought *you* back? I thought you were out of this long ago," Seager said.

"Don't trouble yourself to ask questions," replied Onslow. "You see what I've come to—many thanks to you for it. Now, listen. Nobody knows me here but you, nor do I wish to be known; therefore do you be silent. If you are not, why, you know me of old; and, be assured, I shall, if you disregard

my warning, settle all scores with you at once without hesitation."

"If that's all, don't be afraid," said Seager, apparently relieved at hearing this, and drawing a long breath, "I'll keep it quiet; and more, if you ever want money to get away, you'll find me good for a twenty-pound note."

"Many thanks, my generous friend," returned the dragoon, smiling ironically. "In the mean time, I shall only trouble you to hold your tongue." So saying, he passed on; and Seager, muttering to himself, while his face resumed its natural bronze, "D—d unlucky!—I never thought he would have turned up again," turned away in the opposite direction, which led him past Orelia, who was sitting on the pins of curiosity, as a Persian poet might express it.

"Do you know Mr Onslow?" she asked, with a look that inquired deeper than her words.

"Not at all," returned the brazen Seager, who was never more at home than when telling a lie; "never saw him before, though he's very like a friend of mine, for whom I mistook him. Quite a mistake." And Orelia, altogether disbelieving him, but afraid of betraying too much interest in the dragoon, was obliged, sorely against her will, to forbear further questions.

"Lee," said Tindal presently, walking up to the carriage containing her ladyship and Rosa, beside which Bagot was stationed, "there's a pretty bit of ground there for a small steeple-chase—don't you think something of the kind might amuse the ladies?"

"A deuced good idea!" returned Bagot; "and you might ride in your uniforms, which would be a novelty in the annals of steeple-chasing. 'Twill have a good effect—eh? You might start on that bit of turf, over the ditch and rail, down the slope to the hedge, cross the meadow, and charge the brook ('tisn't over twelve feet there), round through the quickset, then over those low fences and that rasper (the only nasty jump of the lot), down the meadow, and across the brook again, back over the rail and ditch, and finish with a straight run in to the oak tree yonder."

"Capital—couldn't be better," assented the Major, impatient to show his merits as a jockey, which, as before stated, were of a high order. "Now for the riders. Oates, you'll make one, and Bruce another?" Both assented willingly.

"Fane, you're wanted for a steeple-chase," shouted the Major. "Come here."

Fane was cantering past at a little distance, with Julius seated on the holsters, which position he had

been clamorous to attain, while Lady Lee watched him with secret anxiety. As he turned and came towards them, Seager whispered to Bagot, "I say, Colonel, what would you give him now to let the boy drop? He'd be the best friend you ever had!" and Mr Seager grinned. But Bagot did not seem to relish the joke, frowning, and muttering something, which sounded like a curse for Seager.

"I shall be happy to form another leaf in your chaplet, Tindal," Fane said, when the plan was communicated to him. "Major Tindal," said Fane, turning to the ladies, "is sure to win."

"One, two, three, four of you," said Bagot, counting. "Who else?" Sloperton excused himself, on the plea of his horse Bouquet being engaged for the match with Goshawk; and Suckling said his horse was a bad jumper, never could get him over the second fence—which was quite true, for Mr Suckling invariably tumbled off at the first.

"I'll tell you what," said the Colonel; "I've got an old horse up there in the stable, which I shouldn't mind backing for a trifle, if there was anybody to ride him. But he's a difficult horse, and Noble's got no head, though he sits well enough. By the by, there's that rough-rider of yours, Onslow; let him ride for me, and the thing shall come off after lunch." And without waiting for the Major's

approbation of the arrangement, Bagot immediately set off to speak to Onslow on the subject.

"All right, Tindal," he said presently, coming back again; "he says he'll ride him. I'll have the ground marked out directly."

Bagot was not long about this congenial employment; and when he came back, they went into the tent to lunch, which went off very successfully. After it, the Earl of Castle-comical, seated beside Lady Lee, rose and proposed the British army, with some remarks about its valour, loyalty, and achievements, which, if not entirely novel and original, were quite as much applauded as if they had been. And the Major, returning thanks in a short, grim, determined sort of speech, begged to propose the ladies, which called up Captain Sloperton, by universal acclamation, to return thanks, who proved himself a doughty champion of the sex. And as, when that sort of thing once begins, nobody knows where it will end, they might have gone on proposing toasts till nightfall, if Bagot, anxious for the steeple-chase, had not seized an opportunity of adjourning to the scene of action.

Thither, accordingly, the company repaired, and it was not long before the jockeys were ready. Then the Major, complaining of the want of a prize, begged Bagot to procure one of Orelia's gloves, which he did,

and hung it on a branch of the oak which officiated as winning-post, to incite the competitors to deeds of high emprise. Bagot had privately backed the Doctor, his own horse, pretty heavily, being readily taken up by Oates and the Major. "Win if you can," said he to Onslow. The dragoon nodded. "All ready?" inquired Bagot, standing in front of the line of horsemen, handkerchief in hand. "Yes!" answered all. "Off!" and away they went.

Mr Oates, determined to earn distinction, however shortlived, led off at score. Over the ditch and rail he went at a tremendous pace, blundering somewhat at the latter, but righting on the other side; and he succeeded in overcoming the obstacle which Suckling always found so insuperable, viz. the second fence. But his hopes of victory were swallowed up in the brook, in the midst of which he disappeared with a great splash, and from which a pair of heels, with long spurs, were presently seen to emerge, subsequently replaced by a helmet; and when he and his steed struggled through to the bank, the rest were hopelessly ahead.

Victory was still doubtful, as they went over the low fences in the meadows. All kept well together; but Fane and Bruce, both large men, had little chance with their lighter opponents. At the rasper, the latter got a rattling fall, and, though he went on

again like a good one, yet his chance was gone; Fane's weight, too, began to tell as they came up the slope towards home, and he gradually dropt behind.

"Drive down to the fence, and see 'em come over," cried Bagot, in great excitement, to Lady Lee; and accordingly the pony carriage, with its fair occupants seated therein, as before, took up a position near the last leap in the race.

Tindal and Onslow were very close together, both lifting their horses along. The Major saw with despair that the Doctor was still going strong, while he felt his own horse losing ground—

"A ten-pound note if you let me win!" said the Major, forgetting he had a bet on the race, in his eagerness to avoid the shame of defeat.

The dragoon smiled and shook his head. The Doctor gained a few inches every stride.

Ah, Lady Lee! why *did* you drive down to the fence? For now the horses are nearing it, and the Major, his soul wrapt in the struggle, does not look at the fair trio, nor knows they are there. But Onslow glances aside at the carriage. Was it that momentary distraction from the business in hand that snatched victory from him? Perhaps so; at any rate the Doctor, taking the fence in advance, caught the rail with his hind-legs, and came down on the opposite side of the ditch on his head, throwing the

dragoon beyond him, and then rolling over him, horse and man mixed up for a moment in frightful confusion, during which Onslow cast one glance at Orelia, and then lay still.

In a second, Orelia was out of the carriage, and while Rosa and Lady Lee shrieked for aid, cast herself on her knees, and, picking up the head of the prostrate and senseless dragoon, placed it in her lap. It was a pleasant sight for Tindal, who, having snatched down the glove, emblem of victory, was now riding up, all flushed, to receive her congratulations. What is that she is saying to his defeated opponent?—"Why doesn't he speak to her?—only one word?" Tindal reined sharply up, crumpled the glove in his hand, and cast it under his horse's feet, then, pale as a grim statue, sat looking at the Colonel.

Help was speedily brought, and the dragoon carried away to the lodge, which was close at hand. And this accident, joined to a shower that was beginning to fall, dispersed the assembly.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE carriages had driven off; the spectators on foot had followed, such provident and fortunate ones as had brought umbrellas rejoicing underneath the shelter of them. The dragoons, unstrapping their long red cloaks from their saddles, had filed off the grounds and down the road with their officers. Only the Major lingered behind to speak a word to Bagot.

Taking him aside, he clutched his arm with a grip like a vice's—"Did you see?" he muttered between his teeth, not looking at Bagot, but straight forward into vacancy—"Did you see?—did you hear her?"

Bagot was frightened at his manner and the whiteness of his face—"Pho!" said he, "a girl's fancy, if anything—nothing more; a bit of silly romance. The hero of it seems pretty well settled for the time, at any rate" (glancing at Onslow as he was borne away towards the lodge), "and that ought to

be some comfort. She'll forget him in a week, old fellow, and you shall cut in."

"And the disgrace of it, too," continued Tindal, more attentive to his own thoughts than to Bagot's words—"cut out! not by one's equal, but by—— No, I never could forget that in any case—never—never!"

"Then forget *her*, my boy," said Bagot; "and that, perhaps, after all, will be the simplest plan."

"I wish to heaven I could," said Tindal. "I'll try—I will—I will!" (the words coming ground to fragments from between his teeth, while the grasp on Bagot's arm had tightened to such an extent that he was rather anxious to be rid of it).

"Walk a little slower," said Bagot, out of breath from being hurried along at something over five miles an hour. "I'll talk to her, and find how the land lies. Pluck up your spirits, and don't be cut up till you hear from me. I'll talk to her myself, and so shall Hester."

When the Major had taken his horse from the orderly who held him, and ridden him off, Bagot, in fulfilment of his promise, went into the house to talk to Orelia. He found her in the drawing-room, alone—her bonnet and walking-dress still on. Bagot put on a pleasant propitiatory look as he accosted her, for

he felt, in some slight degree, in awe of the imperious young lady.

"My dear Miss Payne," said Bagot, assuming a manner combining the paternal with the gallant, "you'll excuse an old fellow like me, who takes an interest in you, for saying that your conduct was a little—what shall we call it?—imprudent."

No answer from Orelia, except a downward tendency of the corners of the mouth.

"The time is past, my dear girl," continued Bagot, waxing confidentially affectionate, "for putting wayward young ladies under lock and key, or really I should almost feel inclined to recommend a few days' solitary confinement in your case. What d'ye think, now, of your own room, bread and water, and a volume of sermons for a week?" and Bagot smiled in a way at once facetious and conciliatory, to show that he was not inclined to take a harsh view of the matter, but had plenty of indulgence for frailty, especially when its name was young woman. However, the only answer he got was an increased downward curve of the mouth and projection of the under lip.

"One thing is particularly fortunate," he went on, "and that is, that nobody observed anything of the affair, except what I may call our own family—for Rosa Young we may consider one of us—and one

other person, who certainly won't talk of it. Really, all things considered, I hardly regret its having happened, for we shall now be able to reason you out of your folly."

"What folly?" asked Orelia, turning sharply round, with a steady glance of the black eyes.

"Why, what name would you have me give to the extraordinary display of interest you have made for this dragoon?" quoth Bagot, impatiently. "You are about the last young lady I should have suspected of such want of pride as to feel, far less to betray, a partiality for a low-born, low-bred fellow like that."

"Low bred!" cried the indignant Orelia. "Have you no eyes or ears? Can't you see in every look and word his infinite superiority to those whom chance has set over him? And I believe you are equally mistaken in calling him low-born."

"Bless my soul, what extraordinary infatuation!" said the Colonel. "Why, deuce take it, I knew that girls were apt to take absurd fancies, but I never did suspect you of being one of that sort, or of being capable of persisting in such nonsense. I'll admit the fellow's good-looking, and that he rides well; now, will you have the goodness to tell me if you think these sufficient reasons for a young lady of beauty, education, and good expectations, to fall in love with him?"

"I ought to have known," said Orelia, with great scorn, "that you were incapable of perceiving his merits. To do that requires, possibly, some refinement of taste."

"Ah, that's right," said Bagot, reddening; "pitch into me! Well, take your own way—it's no business of mine—but you'll find out soon what other people think of it. I only hope your conduct hasn't quite lost you the good opinion of a man who did admire you, and whose admiration was worth having."

"You mean your friend Major Tindal?" said Orelia.

"And if I did," returned Bagot, "isn't it worth while to think twice before losing such a man? Good family, good fellow, and heir to three thousand a-year—'gad, young lady, I don't know what more you expect."

"And do you suppose that, with all these advantages, and the friendship of Colonel Lee besides, he is worthy to be compared with this unfortunate Mr Onslow?"

"Oh, by Jove!" muttered Bagot, "she must be mad, you know—stark, staring—Hester," he continued, as Lady Lee entered, "come and talk to this headstrong young lady; I can make nothing of her."

Her ladyship did not come into the room in her ordinary composed way, but with a hurried step, while her usually pale face was slightly flushed.

"I am sure," she said quickly—"I am sure that Orelia needs no talking to bring her to a sense of her misconduct. My dear, what could you mean?—you must have been infatuated."

At this address Orelia turned impatiently away, with a slight stamp of her foot, and walked towards the window.

"I am hurt, surprised, confounded!" continued Lady Lee. "Of all my acquaintance, the last whom I should have suspected of forgetting her own self-respect was my friend Orelia Payne."

"Exactly what I've just told her," said the Colonel, nodding assent from the hearth-rug—"exactly."

"I'm really at my wit's end," her ladyship went on; "between surprise and distress, I hardly know what to say. If you would condescend, Orelia, to give me some answer—to repose in me some confidence—to say what could have induced you to lower yourself so—or, best of all, to say you are grieved and ashamed—then my course would be clearer."

Vouchsafing no answer, Orelia swept majestically round and marched out of the room, and up-stairs to her own chamber. From it she did not again emerge that day. Dinner-time came, but she did not appear. Fillett went to tell her they were waiting for her, and found the door locked; and the only reply she got from Orelia was, that she didn't want dinner. Rosa

Young was dreadfully disquieted, and couldn't eat anything for sympathy. She selected a plate of what she thought Orelia would like best (if the reader is anxious to know what, we will tell him ;—it was three slices of the breast of a young duck, with green peas and butter, and new potatoes ; which I mention just to show that my heroines don't live on air like most heroines, but are nourished by their victuals), and, carrying it up-stairs herself, whispered through the keyhole—"Reley, 'tis me, Rosa—won't you open the door? I've brought you some dinner." No answer. "Dear Reley, how can you distress me so? Please open the door, like a dear good Reley"—still no answer. "Reley" (sob), "you make me so unhappy!" (sob, sob) ; "only speak one word." "Go away, and don't plague me," was the reply from within ; and Rosa, sorely distressed, slowly carried her plate down stairs again, stopping now and then on her way to wipe her eyes with her frock.

Julius, too, paid her a visit of condolence. That any one should voluntarily go without their dinner, and decline green peas such as he had seen Rosa put on the plate, was incredible to him, except on the supposition that Orelia was very ill. So, by way of showing his interest in her health, he drummed and kicked at the door, and, afterwards going down on his hands and knees, tried to peep underneath,

when it was suddenly opened, and Orelia, taking him up and kissing him, drew him inside. He staid with her some time, and after he came out, went and told Rosa that Miss Payne had been crying—which Rosa was, on the whole, glad to hear, considering it a symptom that she was becoming more tractable.

However, when she went up-stairs to bed, she did not find her friend much softened. Rosa crept to the chair, where she was seated in her dressing-gown, and put her arm round her neck. Very few people, I should hope, could have felt Rosa's soft cheek rubbing against theirs, and heard her gentle whispers of condolence, without returning the caress; but the patient was obdurate. The only sign of emotion was when Rosa whispered that "*he* was not so much hurt as had at first been thought—the doctor thought he would soon get over it,"—when there was a tumultuous heaving of the upper folds of the dressing-gown. So Rosa, finding her consolations rejected, at length undressed sorrowfully and went to bed.

She did not go to sleep, however, though she pretended to do so, but all the time two soft blue lines might be seen between the eyelashes. Thus she continued to watch Orelia, till the latter suddenly and unexpectedly turned round and fixed her two

piercing eyes on the pretended slumberer, who thereupon, colouring up to the edge of her nightcap, feigned to sleep harder than ever, and even got up a little snore. Presently Orelia extinguished the light, and Rosa thought she was going to bed, but instead of that she came suddenly to Rosa's bedside, threw herself down there, and, clasping her round the neck, began to rain warm tears down upon her cheek.

It would be something entirely new in female hydrostatics, if one woman could cry over another without meeting with a copious supply of fluid in return. Accordingly, there straightway ensued such a pluviose duet of sobbing, murmuring, sighing, and blowing of noses, that nobody hearing this meeting of the waters would have ventured into the room without a waterproof cloak and goloshes—except, perhaps, a Deal boatman or a Newfoundland dog.

"I don't mind talking to you about it, Rosa," whispered the stately penitent in a lull of the tempest, "because you don't lecture me like a great school girl, nor look horrified at me, as if I had committed a crime. And I'm sorry I was sullen to you, for you're a good little thing."

"Yes, indeed, I'm not a bad little thing," sobbed Rosa; "and I'd comfort you if I could."

So Orelia, after a fitful, gusty fashion, proceeded after this little preamble to unbosom herself—half-

confessing that she "loved this bold dragoon;" that she was sure he was, as Rosa also must well know, a high-bred gentleman in reality; that he loved her, as she firmly believed, in return, but was deterred from saying so by an honourable scruple of entangling her with one ostensibly so far below her station in society; that she expected, with his talents, he could not long remain in his obscure position, but would emerge again into the world in his proper character, when she should be proud to acknowledge him; but that, if this expectation proved false, she should still prefer him to all men, being convinced that it was by no fault of his he had fallen so far below himself.

"But you must wait till he does appear in his own character," said Rosa, "before you have anything more to say to him. And you'll not offend Hester and the rest, will you, by showing any interest in him in the meanwhile? and I'll take care to let you know how he's getting on."

On this point, however, Orelia was stubborn. "She should neither unnecessarily show an interest in him, nor conceal it—it was nothing to be ashamed of; if people thought so, it was nothing to her, for she paid very little regard to what people might think of her."

"And some day you'll be married to him, perhaps," said Rosa, "Orelia Onslow!—O, O! Heavens!" said

Rosa, "to think I should have a friend whose initials will be like a pair of spectacles!"

This made Orelia laugh—and, relieved by her confessions, she now kissed Rosa, wished her good-night, and withdrew to her own bed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Curate was now at the summit of human felicity. To have suddenly raised him to a bishopric would have been a mere distracting impertinence. Ah, would Time now but stand still, satisfied with his work, and content to rest on his scythe and look at it! For the summer was come, warm and glorious—and the Curate was as full of out-door plans and pursuits as the fields were of flowers, the trees of singing-birds, the grass of creeping things;—pursuits which he need not enjoy without full sympathy, for they were shared by his friends male and female; and the Curate was never visited by an idea that was not communicable to one or other of them, or both. Since Fane had come, his happiness was complete. Though so different, they had much in common; and the Curate's reflective mind derived great benefit from contact with the masculine one of his friend. Communion with a too gentle and complying nature

is like walking on a feather-bed, but from a firm uncompromising spirit you bound with vigour.

Fane, too, felt these new scenes in charming contrast with the life he had hitherto led, which had been too changeful and eventful for much reflection.

"I never did believe, Josey," he said one day at the parsonage, "that these enervating influences could ever have gained such power over me. I find myself constantly impelled either to visit that Castle of Indolence, the Heronry, or else this smaller branch or offshoot from it—this Sleepy Hollow, of which you are the Archimage. Masculine attire is a reproach to a man who leads this sort of sauntering life: next week you will see me in robes and a chaplet."

In fact, there was something seductive about the atmosphere of the Heronry which it was difficult for any but very strong-minded people—*i. e.*, the petrifactions of humanity—to resist. Setting aside the enchantresses whose abode it was, and whose fascinations, I trust, I need not enlarge upon at this time of day, the place itself had a touch of dreamy enchantment about it; so that although there never was a house in the world where less of constraint was exercised, yet those who went there often found it very difficult to go away. As you entered the grounds the busy world seemed to recede, and its humming to grow faint and insignificant—the forms and cere-

monies and struggles of life seemed the merest vanities; while you, divested of work-a-day thoughts and cares, stept at once into the Georgian era.

In spite of modern inventions, and rare shrubs and plants unknown to the horticulture of the ancients, the gardens and shrubberies had an antique air—owing partly to some remnants of the taste of former days in clipt yew and box trees, and pleached alleys, partly to the venerable presence of many mossy ancient gods and goddesses, whose time-worn figures lurked amid the bushes and fountains—but most to their prevailing air of shelter and seclusion. That garden which was Lady Lee's favourite, and where she spent a good deal of time in fine weather, had so much of these qualities, that you might easily miss it altogether, unless previously acquainted with its whereabout. It was sunk in a kind of ravine, the shady slope of which was covered with grass and wildflowers, the sunny one with strawberry plants, while above stood a sheltering grove. All sounds finding their way in here were dull and remote, except the songs of the thrushes and blackbirds in the neighbouring trees. Passing along the middle path, a flight of steps led up to a turf walk, bordered by a row of yew trees, looking like a rich cathedral aisle, beyond which appeared a more extensive and less sequestered garden, having at one end a row of

greenhouses. Curious and expensive plants flourished there;—rare ferns from Australia; brilliant tropical flowers, maintained in life and lustre by artificial heat; water-lilies, whose ancestors grew by the Nile, floated on the surface of tanks, with gold-fish darting underneath the broad leaves;—in fact, the ends of the earth sent tribute to that compendious conservatory.

No wonder that the Curate enjoyed his visits here, and thought himself in Paradise—no wonder that Fane felt attracted to the Heronry—no wonder that Lady Lee felt a shock given to her acquired *poco-curantism*.

Intellectual women sympathise more with ambition than with content, and value a strong mind above the finest disposition in a man. They like something to lean against, with assurance of finding firm support; they like a nature round which their own may twine upward. Many gentle, worthy ladies could have loved the Curate, while they would have shrunk timidly from the more independent nature of his friend, that broke through conventionalities, and thought for itself: to them, contact with such a nature would have seemed perilous. But Lady Lee, loving the Curate as her good and wise brother, had not found in him much of shelter or support; while the less reverential and more aspiring mind of Fane had touched her long-dormant sympathies, and

renewed the youth of her heart. Pope stood, now, once again unopened on the book-shelf, and Madame de Stael reigned in his stead.

One evening the two friends were seated together on the grassy bank above the garden already described, in company with Rosa and Lady Lee—the latter conversing with them, the former preferring the society of Julius—Fane had been talking of his Indian campaigns.

"What would you say, O peaceful, philanthropic Josey," he said, after describing a sanguinary affair he had taken part in, "if I were to tell you that I, all pacific and amiable as I sit here, have felt, in the heat of conflict, an actual thirst for blood—a desire to slay?—such as filled those whom history execrates as 'sparing neither age or sex'—or as 'putting all to the sword, old and young?'"

"Why, of course, I should not believe you, Durham."

"Fact, nevertheless," said Fane. "I wish I could flatter myself that 'twas Milton's 'deliberate valour' that I breathed; but, unfortunately, it was something altogether more tiger-like: It is a phase of human nature bordering, I'm afraid, on the diabolical side."

"Happy are we," returned the Curate, "who can walk among these peaceful scenes, knowing nothing of such terrible feelings."

"Now, there, I think you are wrong," returned his friend. "If there are such hidden corners in our souls, 'tis as well to be aware of the fact. If we have still connections on the infernal side, why should we disown our kindred? To have experienced such feelings even makes me more tolerant and humane; for while you look on sackers of cities, and perpetrators of the accompanying horrors, as so many incarnate demons, I see in them merely brethren given over to their natural passions."

"I've no desire to look into such black abysses," quoth the Curate. "Finding plenty of pleasant chambers in my nature wherein to enjoy myself peaceably, I should deserve the fate of Bluebeard's wives if I sought to pry into forbidden corners. Why, I could be content," Josiah went on, "to sit here as we are now, and look upon this landscape till the world had struggled itself into the next half-century—till our beards grew to our waists, and Rosa's and Hester's hair to their feet, like the Sleeping Beauty's."

"I've no fault to find with the landscape," said Fane; "in fact, 'tis quite after my own heart—and the figures in the foreground are unimpeachable" (with a side-glance at Lady Lee). "But, considering the useless life I've led of late, I don't feel as if I had earned the right to enjoy the scene."

"But to leave one's-self no time for reflection or enjoyment is a worse error than the other," said Lady Lee. "I pity those who have no duties or incentives to action" (with a sigh); "but I pity more those who rush through a pleasant world with their eyes always fixed on something in front. There are some who, in their eagerness for turning everything and every moment to practical account, grudge even libations to the gods as wasteful."

"Of the two courses our friend Josey's is the more seductive, and I even think the more respectable," returned Fane. "But how one's sense of tranquil enjoyments would be heightened, if they came to refresh us after the excitement of a bustling campaign or a stormy session!"

"But if we of simple tastes can relish nature without your *sauce piquante*, Durham?—and as for action and the struggles of life, why, we can read about them. When I want excitement, can I not plunge into the world of books—history, poetry, romance, what not? After reading a well-written book," said the reverend Josiah, taking a short flight from the subject in hand (for a literary quarry would always lure him away from any other), "the halls of my brain are thronged with a goodly company. I wish I could bid them stay, and make that house

their home ; but in a short time they depart, as from the roof of a stranger, and the place thereof knows them no more. It is these transient visits from the children of genius that gives me such a respect for genius itself. I cannot help reverencing and envying spirits which can, almost at will, evoke images of such grace and power that a mere glimpse of them suffices to make a humbler nature happy."

"You are the most enviable of ecclesiastics," said Fane, "and I wish I could imitate you ; but I can't. Inaction is to me a perpetual reproach."

Contrasts of sentiment like these were, to Lady Lee's mind, rather unfavourable to the Curate. Full of goodness, simplicity, and a certain mild wisdom, his mind, contrasted with Fane's, seemed characterised by an inglorious softness. In him was wanting the power that most of all allures an imaginative woman—the power to excite and interest her imagination. The Curate was amiable, excellent, worthy of all esteem; but she could include him, and see the boundary of all the tracks of his thoughts, while Fane's seemed to lead boldly out into regions such as Bunyan saw in his dream, peopled with tremendous forms. Under other circumstances, and in other days, the Curate might have made a patient and excellent martyr, but he would never have been a leader or discoverer. Fane's capacities of thought

and enjoyment lay more in the regions of the unknown and untried, and therefore it was at once less easy and more exciting to follow him.

Then, if we consider the difference of outward form in the two men—Fane tall, robust, upright, with a far-seeing glance—the Curate somewhat loose, shambling, given to supine attitudes, and with his reflective look turned to the earth—Ah, Josiah, what evil spirit brought your friend to Lanscote, or fixed your simple heart on Lady Lee?

As they walked back to the house in the cool of the evening, the sight of the lodge, near which they passed, reminded Lady Lee that she intended to ask Fane concerning the previous history and character of the dragoon Onslow, who lay sick there, in order to discover, if possible, some clue to the yet unaccountable fancy of Orelia.

In reply to her questions, Fane said that Onslow had, from the first, particularly attracted his notice.

"Without being at all morose," said Fane, "he has always kept aloof from the rest of the men—'among them, but not of them.' And, though this kind of demeanour, implying conscious superiority, is exactly what would most have roused their resentment and excited ill feeling, if shown by one whose pretensions were unfounded, yet he always seems to have commanded a remarkable degree of

respect. His manners and language are singularly good, and there is a good deal of pride about him. In the last town we were quartered in, his appearance had so fascinated a rich widow, that her partiality for him, which she took no pains to conceal, became quite notorious, and she did not scruple to acquaint him with it. But though she was not only rich, but by no means wanting in beauty, he, in his usual easy half-scornful way, rejected her offers as if she had been an old applewoman, or he a millionaire. I intend to look in presently, and see how he is getting on, for I confess I am greatly interested in him."

Lady Lee did not know whether to be glad or sorry at receiving this information. On the one hand, she rejoiced to find that Orelia's taste had not gone so far astray as had at first appeared; on the other, she feared that it might prove something more than a mere passing fancy which the young lady had conceived for this conquering dragoon.

Fane, on reaching the lodge on his homeward way, entered. As it could not be seen from the Heronry, nor the Heronry from it, there had been no occasion to build it in any particular style. Accordingly, it was a long, low, somewhat irregular cottage, with an overhanging thatched roof, and deep casement windows clustered with flowers; looking

very pleasant and snug, with its background of foliage, as you approached the arched ivy-covered gateway. Onslow lay in an inner room, on a sofa, drawn close to the open window. He was reading, and laid down his book on the window-seat as Fane entered.

"Well, Onslow," said Fane, seating himself on a chair close by, "how are you getting on? Well, I hope."

"This is very kind of you, Captain Fane," returned Onslow. "Yes, I am almost well, I think; nothing ails me now but weakness."

"'Twas an ugly tumble," said the Captain. "I was close behind you and saw it. I'm not sure, though, whether I wouldn't undergo just such another, to be picked up in the same way you were."

The dragoon flushed a deep red, and turned his eyes from Fane's; he seemed to have heard something of the scene that followed his mishap.

"However," said Fane, "you will, I see, be shortly on your legs again, and I hope, in a few days, you will be fit to resume your duty."

"I shall never resume my duty," said Onslow. "I am no longer a soldier. Not half an hour ago, I received a notification of my discharge from the service."

"On what grounds?" asked Fane, with surprise.

"By my own desire," returned Onslow.

"I am sorry for this," said Fane. "We shall lose a good soldier. And it seems a pity, too, when you were rising fast, and might have looked forward to a position more worthy of you: for I have long been of opinion that, whatever may have been your motives for enlisting, you quitted your proper place in society, and must, in your present one, have suffered most disagreeable constraint."

The ex-dragoon did not reply.

"Without wishing to intrude into your affairs, or pry into your secrets, I will hope," Fane went on, "that you are either about to resume your proper station, or else that you are exchanging your late path to it for a more promising one."

The dragoon shook his head. "So far from that being the case," he said, "he had as yet formed no plans for the future."

"Onslow," said Fane, after a pause, "I frankly own that you have excited in me much interest and esteem; and therefore, if I can be of service to you, as I probably can, you may command me. And I say this not as an empty form—but if you will accept an advance of a sum which I can very well spare, to the extent of purchasing you a commission in a

regiment where you might renew your career under better auspices, you shall have it at a word."

The dragoon's nerves were probably shaken by his illness, for his eyes filled, and his voice was unsteady, as he answered.

"Captain Fane," he said, "it is a noble offer. But though there is not a man in the world whom I esteem more than yourself, you are the very last from whom I would accept a favour."

"That's puzzling," said Fane. "But I will not take an answer now; you shall have time to think of it. In the mean time, is there anything I can send you?—books, or comforts of any kind?"

Onslow was amply supplied, he said, with all, by the kindness of Lady Lee.

The dragoon's hand that lay on the edge of the sofa had a signet-ring on the little finger. Fane, noticing this, could not help glancing curiously at it. It was shield-shaped, of white cornelian, and having a crest cut deeply on it; but at that distance Fane could not distinguish the device. Onslow, catching the direction of his eye, quietly turned the stone inward on his palm.

"Well," said Fane, smiling as he rose, "I see you are resolute in your secresy. Heaven forbid I should be impertinent, even in my wish to serve you. I will leave you now to think over what I have said."

The dragoon warmly pressed the hand that was extended to him. "Again I thank you," he said, "but it is impossible."

"Proud fellow that," thought Fane, as he wended his way homeward. "I will devise something to do him good in spite of himself."

END OF VOL. I.

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